

## A (NOT SO) BRIEF HISTORY OF PEACE CORPS IRAN ASSOCIATION

By Douglas G. Schermer (Semnan, Shahrud, 1966-67)

*Author's note: As of June 30, 2026, PCIA has dissolved as a nonprofit. However, limited "wrap-up" continued. My dear friend Genna Wangsness died on June 18<sup>th</sup>. She had written a 600-page history of Peace Corps volunteer activities in Iran between 1962 and 1976. It seemed appropriate to me to draft a history of the Peace Corps Association. I based this article using past issues of the KhabarNameh newsletter, documents gathered as a founding member of PCIA, email correspondence, and personal recollections.*

*For the 2025 PCIA conference in Washington, D.C., Wangsness, her daughter Alison Clement, Brad Hanson, Joan Gaughan, and I published entitled Yadegar, a memory booklet. It contains information about PCIA activities which I have not included here such as lists of PCIA leaders, titles of books published by PCIA members, PC Iran directors and staff members, a list of sites where volunteers served, and a list of books discussed in the Dooreh-y Ketaab book club.*

*There is a separate document by Bill Brandon in which he describes the story of how the National Peace Corps Association organized tours to Iran.*

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

In 1962 the first group of 43 Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Iran joined by others for a total 1748 by the time the program ended in 1976. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's call to “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your country,” these volunteers worked as teachers, engineers, urban planners, agriculture advisors, doctors and nurses, social workers, and even as musicians in the Tehran philharmonic.

Kennedy outlined these goals for the Peace Corps program:

1. To help the people 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.

Beginning in 1986, a decade after Peace Corps departed the country, Iran Returned Peace Corps Volunteers began organizing to support the third goal of the Peace Corps with activities focused on better understanding and better relations between Americans and Iranians, with three distinct organizations formed as affiliates of the National Peace Corps Association. In chronological order these are the **Iran Peace Corps Association (IPCA)**, the **Peace Corps Friends of Iran (PCFOI)**, and the **Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA)**.

## I. 1986 - Iran Peace Corps Association (IPCA)

The **Iran Peace Corps Association** was formed in 1986 following the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Peace Corps celebration in Washington, DC. As described by **Joe Truskot** (Ardestan, 1972-74) in an April 1988 newsletter, **Tom Hughes** (Zabol, 1968-69), **Steve Grummon** (Bushehr, 1970-71) **Colin MacKinnon** (Tehran, 1965-67), **Tom Ricks** (Mashhad, Mahabad, 1964-44), and **Jerome Clinton** (Mollasani, 1962-64), and others met in Washington, DC, at an event sponsored by the **National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (NCRPCV**, today known as the **National Peace Corps Association**) on the Washington Mall. **Hughes** organized a panel to inform attendees of the situation in Iran. Those in attendance decided to form an organization for Iran Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs).

Under the heading of “country of service,” NCRPCVs had many “Friends of ...” affiliates. **Truskot** agreed to be the official organizer of an Iran affiliate with NCRPCV. However, there was discussion about the name because “Friends of Iran” did not seem suitable at that time. Thus, **Iran Peace Corps Association** became the inaugural name for Iran RPCVs. In 1988 IPCA published this purpose statement:

The sole purpose of the organization IPCA is to increase American understanding of Iran based on the Peace Corps experiences of its members. The organization exists in the spirit of the goals of the Peace Corps and emphasizes local, one-to-one efforts in achieving its ends.

A major challenge to Iran RPCVs was the lack of a comprehensive list of those who had served in the Peace Corps. It was not until 2018 that the Peace Corps released basic volunteer information and then only to the National Peace Corps Association. In turn, NPCA shared this information about those who served in Iran with me, with my pledge to abide by the NPCA privacy policy.

Under the editorship of **Michael Hillmann** (Mashhad, Karaj, Tehran, 1965–72), the first issue of *Iran Peace Corps Association Newsletter* was published in April 1988 featuring an article by **Truskot** about the formation of the group. In that article, he summarized a needs assessment survey of members which he summarized in this “Statement of Purpose.”

1. Develop membership by locating former volunteers, staff, and others to document their experiences in Iran and encourage them to rekindle friendships with one another,
2. Inform members of current developments relating to Iran through bulletins, newsletters, bibliographies, cultural events, and regional and national gatherings,

3. Call on members to take community action such as writing letters, placing articles, addressing groups, and devising programs that allow Americans to learn more about Iran, and,
4. Assist Iranians on a one-to-one basis in the spirit of reciprocating kindness PCVs and staff encountered while living in Iran.

This first issue also featured an article by **Gertrude Nye Dorry** (Manager of the Iran PC TEFL Program), entitled *Life in Tehran Today*.

Collecting contact information about volunteers was a significant challenge in the pre-internet era. Using “word of mouth” and snail mail, IPCA compiled membership directories in 1986, 1987, and 1988. Individuals who had kept lists of their group members provided information to **Truskot**. These lists were used as a foundation by the Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA) when it was incorporated in 2012.

In October of 1988, the second issue of *Iran Peace Corps Association Newsletter* focused on identifying and locating volunteers who served in Iran. **Truskot** thanked members who had sent in contact information of fellow volunteers including: **Bob and Bunny Marriott** (Mashhad, 1970-72), **Greg and Patti Zilka** (Sirjan, 1969-71), **Neil Hart** (Hamadan, 1969-71), and **Charlie and Marie Mitchell** (Mahallat, 1974-76).

In the late 1980s the only way to publish and distribute newsletters and membership directories was by print and mail. Dues were essential to cover those costs. **Truskot** shared with me a single page list of Iran RPCVs with a total of 33 names. The 1986 directory listed 68 names and addresses. In 1987 this number had grown to 96. By 1988 the directory included 551 names. A grant from **Donna Shalala** (Mollasani, 1962-64) helped cover printing and mailing costs for the 1988 directory.

I noted that an announcement placed in the newsletter of the International Society for Iranian Studies resulted in a response from **F. Diba**. That was **Farhad Diba**, at that time a resident of London, who had written extensively about his uncle, Mohammad Mossadegh. Diba subscribed to PCIA newsletters, occasionally sharing a comment or correction with me. When we offered several books as a fund raiser, Diba purchased two of them with instructions to send them to the University of North Carolina where he sponsors a collection of Iran focused books in English.

Included in the initial list of goals in the “statement of purpose” was a desire to document volunteer stories. In a 1989 newsletter **Truskot** noted that a grant proposal to the **National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers** (currently, the **National Peace Corps Association**) to fund an anthology of firsthand experiences in Iran was not funded. However, years later, **John Krauskopf** (Ahwaz, Kermanshah, Arak, Babolsar, 1965-69) gathered stories

from thirty-one volunteers for an anthology of such stories, published in 2021, with the title of *Memories and Insights: Iran Through the Eyes of Peace Corps Volunteers*. In 2023, after a decade of research and writing, a 600-page comprehensive history of the Peace Corps volunteer experiences in Iran was completed with the publication of, *Land Between Two Waters: The Peace Corps Fourteen Years in Iran*, by **Genna Stead Wangsness** (Shiraz, Tehran, 1965-71). Both books are available on Amazon. **Wangsness** also reported on volunteer stories in her column, *Historical Reflections*, in the KhabarNameh. Additionally, I was able to post 75 stories on our website, featuring several contributions about the deadly 1968 earthquake in Khorasan.

In support of the objective to inform members about current events in Iran, **IPCA's** July 1991 newsletter included *Tehran, A Revolution Later*. Authored by **Michael Hillmann**, it was the featured article in which he reported on a trip to Iran, his first in 14 years. He described difficult encounters with customs officials both on arrival and departure as contrasted with the kindness and courtesy from local Tehranis.

Also in the July 1991 issue, **Jim Anderson** (Fouman, Someshera, 1964-66) reported on a RPCV conference in Eugene, Oregon in 1990 which attracted several Iran RPCVs including: **David Martin** (Tarbal-e-Heydarieh, 1967-69), **Kathy MacLeod** (Tehran, Gorgan, 1964-66), **Bill Miller** (Rasht, 1964-66), **David Piercy** (Gorgan, 1964-66), **David Habiger** (Karand, 1971-73), **Geraldine Gillio** (Ahwaz, Mahabad, Kermanshah, 1966-68), **Michael Hillmann**, **Louis and Vinnie Principe** (Shahrud, Chalus, Nowshahr, 1974-75), **Neil Armantrout** (Shiraz, 1965-67), **Fred Noland** (Isfahan, 1966-67), **Ira Frankel** (Shiraz, 1966-67), **John Lorentz** (Karaj, 1962-64), and **Jackie and Mike Spurlock** (1974-76, Abadeh, Riz).

**Anderson** reported that volunteer conversations focused on activities Iran Peace Corps Association could pursue beginning with ways to *enhance communication and understanding between Iranians and Americans*, an idea that was a major theme of all three Iran RPCV associations.

Issue #1 of **IPCA's** newsletter listed books written by or translated by Iran RPVCs, including **Leonard Bogle** (Kerman, 1972-74), **Raymond Cowart** (Salehabad, Tehran, 1972-73), **Tom Ricks**, **Jerome Clinton**, **Mary E. Hegland** (Mahabad, Tehran, 1966-68), **Michael Hillmann**, **Michael Jerald** (Tehran, 1969-72), **John Limbert** (Sanandaj, 1964-66), **Colin MacKinnon**, and **Barry Rosen** (Tehran, Bandar Pahlavi, Hamadan, 1967-69).

The third **IPCA** newsletter (August 1989) contained another list of books written by or translated by Iran RPCVs that included works by **Jerome Clinton**, **Michael Hillmann**, **Eric Hoogland** (Mianeh, 1965-68), **Don Laffoon** (Hamadan, 1964-66), and **Terence O'Donnell** (Shiraz, 1960-70s). The Peace Corps Iran Association continued this practice of listing books by PCIA authors in its newsletter, the *KhabarNameh*, and on its website until its dissolution June 2026.

There were no subsequent IPCA newsletters. But in August 1991, the Iran Peace Corps Association participated in the 30<sup>th</sup> Peace Corps Anniversary Conference and Celebration in Washington, DC, with **Keith Kendall** (Jaydash, 1974-76) as IPCA's coordinator, and **Earl Glock** (Ardestan, 1974-76) in charge of arrangements for an IPCA dinner at a Persian restaurant.

Around 1991, **Truskot** moved from the DC area to California. **Bob Snow** (Yazd, 1965-67) stayed on as treasurer but, with no real activity, he ultimately forwarded donations to NPCA.

## II. 1999 and 2002 – National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) and Friendship Force

In 1999 NPCA and Friendship Force sponsored a trip to Iran for RPCVs under the leadership of **Bill Brandon** (Shiraz, 1964-66) who had travelled to Iran in 1998 on a feasibility trip. According to Brandon, 27 individuals went on the tour; most of whom were volunteers who had served in Iran, although the group also included two children of volunteers and several RPCVs who had served in other countries, including the Friendship Force representative, **Harriet Kuhr**. Iran RPCVs on this tour included **Ernie and Sue Bentley** (Kerend, 1968-70), **Jeff Gritzner** (Ahwaz, 1962-64), **Bob and Phyllis McPherron** (Isfahan, 1968-70), **Paul Pirozzola** (Nekah, 1964-70), **Emily Wells** (Lars, 1969-71), **Paul Levering** (Dezful, 1964-67), **Barbara Nelson** (Isfahan, 1966-67), **Tom Putnam** (Darab, Yazd, 1967-69), **Guenther Vogt** (Tehran, 1969-71), **Dee Fink** (Ahwaz, 1962-64), **Donley Smith** (Tehran, 1965-67), **Griff Nelson** (Shiraz, 1967-69), and **Dottie McCulloch** (Isfahan, 1964-66).

**Brandon** authored a narrative about this trip which is attached as an appendix.

**E.W. Peter Russell's** (Bandar Pahlavi, 1965-67) initial vision in support of Goal Three involved mutual exchanges between Iranians and Americans on cultural and professional lines that could expand mutual understanding. Previously he had met with Iranian officials at the UN in New York about such exchanges. He also had worked with **Anne Baker** (Fiji, 1985-87) at NPCA to organize a trip to Iran in 2002 in conjunction with Friendship Force. In preparation for that trip, he coordinated with **Sussan Tahmasebi** who worked for the Science and Arts Foundation which sought to bring wider public attention to the situation of Iranian youth, journalists, and others speaking up for greater freedom. With her help, visits with other NGOs were arranged for Tehran, Yazd, and Rasht. In Yazd the group met with an NGO supporting the vision impaired, including use of computers with software for the blind.

## III. 2003 - Peace Corps Friends of Iran (PCFOI)

While previous efforts to organize Iran RPCVs used copy machines and snail mail, the advent of the internet made communication easier and less expensive. The call to form the **Peace Corps Friends of Iran** was made in a 2003 email in which **Russell** sought to initiate affiliation with NPCA and invited about 36 Iran RPCVs who were members of NPCA to join. The group was formally recognized as an NPCA affiliate in 2004 under the leadership of **Russell** who had worked to organize the NPCA and Friendship Force trip to Iran in 2002.

In November 2003, using a NPCA listserv, **Russell** sent this invitation to organize **Peace Corps Friends of Iran** (PCFOI) in which he wrote:

Most of us who served as Peace Corps Volunteers or Staff in Iran in the 1960's and 1970's were very positively affected by that experience. Virtually all retain a strong affection for the Iranian people and for the culture and traditions of Iran. Thus, a significant number of Iran RPCVs responded positively to trips in 1999 and 2002 organized by the National Peace Corps Association in cooperation with the Friendship Force. We now want to take additional steps to advance positive contact with the Iranian people.

**Ted von Briesen** (Kermanshah, 1965-67) and **Bill Brandon**, among others, supported Russell in seeking to create an Iran affiliate with NPCA. With help from **Anne Baker**, PCFOI became an official affiliate of NPCA in 2004. One benefit of affiliation meant that it was possible for one to join NPCA and join the Peace Corps Friends of Iran and pay dues to both organizations at the same time. The officers at that time included: **E.W. Peter Russell**, Group Leader; **Gretchen Kafoury** (Zanjan, 1964-66), Vice-President; **David Jaynes** (Shiraz, 1973-75), Treasurer; **Bill Brandon**, Project Officer; **Douglas Schermer** (Semnan, Shahrud, 1966-67), Education Chair; **Gerry Gillio** (Ahwaz, Mahabad, Kermanshah, 1966-68), Membership Chair; and **Dane F. Smith** (Ethiopia/Eritrea, 1963-65), NPCA Liaison. The group used a Yahoo listserv and an NPCA proprietary Facebook-like application called "Ning" to communicate amongst the 36 members.

One key PCFOI objective focused on a US-Iran Exchange Program to advance contact with Iranians to implement a proposed project to bring a few Iranian educators to the US for training and homestay and deploy a few PCFOI members to Iran to work with an NGO engaged in educational activities, particularly for the visually impaired. According to **Russell**, this project had received encouragement from the US Department of State and Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. PCFOI, in addition to bringing together those interested in promoting closer relations with Iran, would have provided a base for this promising project. Unfortunately, this project was not realized.

#### IV. 2011 - Peace Corps Iran Association

In honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peace Corps, a celebration in Portland, Oregon, was organized for August 5-7, 2011, by **Jackie Spurlock**, **Douglas Schermer**, and **Genna Stead Wangsness** to be held in the facilities of Portland State University which had been the site of several Peace Corps Iran training camps. A resident of Portland, **Spurlock** was also a member of the local **American Iranian Friendship Council** (AIFC). Led by **Goudarz Eghtedari**, AIFC served as the nonprofit fiscal agent for the conference which was planned to coincide with the 12<sup>th</sup> annual Portland Iranian Festival. The reunion's steering committee included **Jeff Curtis** (Somehsara, Qeshm Island, 1967-70), **Nancy Sagafi-Nejad** (Shiraz, 1965-58), **Mike Spurlock** (Abadeh, Riz. 1974-76), and **Roger Wangsness** (Shiraz, Tehran, 1965-71).

**Anne Baker** again played a key role by sharing contact information of about 600 Iran RPCVs known to NPCA, of which about 300 had valid email addresses. Without this help, the conference and reunion in Portland could not have happened. **Spurlock** and **Wangsness** handled program and logistical arrangements at Portland State University, while **Schermer** focused on email marketing, registration, and financial details. Over 300 volunteers, staff, and family members attended the three-day event. One outcome was the organization of the Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA), which became incorporated in 2012 as the successor to the Peace Corps Friends of Iran.

Using Skype to conduct meetings, PCIA's first board of directors included **Jackie Spurlock**, President; **Ken Opin** (Semnan, 1964-66), Vice-President; **Carolyn Yale** (Shiraz, 1974-76), Secretary; **Doug Schermer**, Treasurer; **Mary Beckett Marks** (Kerman, 1964-66), Newsletter Editor; **John Krauskopf** and **John Salamack** (Bojnoord, 1965-67), Board Members. **Genna Stead Wangsness** declined to serve on the board instead focusing on her role as historian.

In September of 2012, the first issue of the *KhabarNameh*, the organization's newsletter, **Spurlock** wrote:

First, we identified two general purposes: 1) Use the goals and ideals of the Peace Corps to build a climate of mutual respect, interaction, and peace between Americans and Iranians, and provide a forum for Americans to gain a better understanding of Iran; and 2) gather, preserve, and communicate the legacy of Peace Corps Iran.

The board then set these major objectives:

- Establish *KhabarNameh* as PCIA's newsletter.
- Plan a reunion, in collaboration with the NPCA in Boston in 2013.
- Identify and locate Iran RPCVs.
- Gather and share written memories of our Peace Corps experiences.

Additional objectives were later added:

- Incorporate as a nonprofit in Oregon (accomplished in March 2012).
- Receive 501 (c) (3) tax exempt status with the IRS (which was approved on August 14, 2013).
- Use MailChimp to send emails to members.
- Create a Facebook group for members (set up in 2012).
- Set up a website ([www.peacecorpsiran.org](http://www.peacecorpsiran.org) was launched in 2015).

PCIA's formal mission statement was developed in 2013:

**The mission of the Peace Corps Iran Association is to preserve the legacy of Peace Corps Iran, foster a better understanding of Iran in the U.S., and build a climate of mutual understanding between Americans and Iranians.**

The mission statement was revised in 2016:

**The Peace Corps Iran Association advances peace and understanding between Americans and Iranians through outreach, education, and advocacy, and upholds the legacy of Peace Corps in Iran.**

The last revision of the mission statement came in 2021:

**Building on the legacy of Peace Corps in Iran, PCIA advances peace and understanding through education, outreach, and advocacy.**

## **V. Telling Our Stories and Preserving Our Legacy**

As noted above, the first goal of the **Iran Peace Corps Association** in 1988 included encouraging Iran RPCVs to document their experiences in Iran. While that initial attempt to gather an anthology of stories did not materialize, **John Krauskopf's** anthology was successfully published in 2021. PCIA used a variety of methods to accomplish the goal of preserving our legacy, including the *KhabarNameh*, **Genna Stead Wangsness's** book, the PCIA website, and oral histories.

### **a. KhabarNameh**

In September 2012 the newly formed **Peace Corps Iran Association** published its first newsletter *KhabarNameh*, Persian for “newsletter.” **Mary Beckett Marks** (Kerman, 1964-66)



served as editor until **Joan Mickelson Gaughan** (Lahijan, Rasht, 1965-66) assumed editorship in September 2016.

The *KhabarNameh* had been published at least twice a year, and occasionally three to four issues were produced. The internet played a key role at this time making it possible to distribute PDF versions by email which meant there were no printing or postage expenses. Thus, PCIA did not need dues to pay for mailings.

The *KhabarNameh* featured columns on such topics as books about Iran, stories of individual volunteers, travel to Iran, information about NPCA conferences, poetry, Persian films, recipes, obituaries, links to websites of interest, and much more.

In the first issue, PCIA reported on the death of **Judith Ann Marie Brooks** (1964-66, Mollasani, Mashhad). In subsequent issues the last article was *In Memoriam* in which **Wangsness** provided short obituaries of recent Iran RPCVs who had died. She also gathered complete obituaries which are now part of the PCIA archives linked to the PCIA website. At this writing, there are 425 obituaries of volunteers, staff, trainers, and friends. Sadly, the last obituary posted by PCIA was that of **Genna Wangsness** who died June 18, 2026.

Many articles in *KhabarNameh* focused on preserving volunteer memories:

- *Recollections* edited by **Dave Devine** (Zahedan, 1971-73) included such stories as “Five Days to Parenthood” by **Jan Carlson** (Borujerd, 1971-73) who adopted an orphan in Tehran with her husband **Robert Carlson**.
- *Where are they Now?* edited by **Genna Stead Wangsness**, featured short vignettes about volunteers’ lives after Iran.
- *Historical Reflections*, also by **Wangsness**, reported on many Peace Corps member experiences.

#### **b. Anthology: Memories and Insights**

In addition to *KhabarNameh*, PCIA was active in gathering and publishing volunteer stories through other avenues. **John Krauskopf** led a project to collect stories which resulted in the 2021 publication of *Memories and Insights: Iran Through the Eyes of Peace Corps Volunteers*, with profits going to PCIA. (Available on Amazon.) John also maintained a bibliography of books by Iran RPCVs posted on the PCIA website.

#### **c. PCIA Website**

In my role as webmaster, I posted additional stories to the PCIA website with approximately 75 stories that were downloadable as PDF files. The centerpiece of this collection was volunteer stories about volunteer relief work following the 1968 Khorasan earthquake.

The PCIA website, [www.peacecorpsiran.org](http://www.peacecorpsiran.org), went through three iterations. The first version was created using WordPress, a common web design application. **Tom Huf** (Babolsar, Sari, Mashhad, Tehran, 1967-71) challenged two of his University of Massachusetts Amherst graduate students in architecture, to assist. **Mohsen Daemi** helped set up the template I used to post articles and pictures. **Maryam Shafiee** designed the logo for us. (Later **Shafiee** served on the poetry panel at the Boston conference and edited the *From the Ashpaz Khaneh* column in the KhabarNameh which featured recipes for Persian meals.)

The second version of our website coincided with Covid when NPCA encouraged us to use a new website platform called SilkStart. For me, SilkStart was a major challenge. Fortunately, the NPCA offered tutoring by **Ella Dowell** (webmaster for a Californian RPCV group) who provided weekly sessions on Zoom. Thanks to Covid, I had the time to build an extensive website, including a document archive. SilkStart also featured a bulk email system I used to send newsletters to members. A final bonus was the ability to register for events and collect donations.

More recently, NPCA switched to a dual track system. The website itself reverted to WordPress. Fortunately, NPCA contracted with FatLab for technical services to convert our SilkStart website back to WordPress and I managed to relearn old tricks. Membership data, bulk emails, event registration, and donations are now handled by Blackbaud's Raisers' Edge. For me this involved "teaching an old Doug new tricks." Thanks to help from **Travis Matthews** at NPCA, things are working well. As we planned for PCIA to dissolve in 2026, NPCA encouraged us to use their new service, Peace Corps Connect+.

#### **d. Land Between Two Waters**

Gathering, recording, and publishing Iran RPCV experiences was a feature of each issue of the *KhabarNameh*. This led to a decade of work gathering information by **Genna Stead Wangsness**, resulting in the publication of *Land Between Two Waters: The Peace Corps Fourteen Years in Iran*. The book contains stories of volunteer experiences organized in chronological order for each training group. This was published by PCIA as a fund raiser in time for the Chicago 2023 conference and is available on Amazon. Her boxes of research files were donated to **American University** which has agreed to archive PCIA documents. PCIA's dissolution plan included donating digital archives to American University.

While the American University accepts original Iran RPCV documents, members were encouraged to donate artifacts to the **Museum of the Peace Corps Experience**.

### e. Dooreh-ye Ketaab Book Discussions

Initiated in 2017 by **Jackie Spurlock**, PCIA sponsored the Dooreh-ye Ketaab book discussion program on Zoom which met six times a year until 2016. Over its eight-year span, books by PCIA members and Iranian authors were featured, often with the author present on the Zoom call. Spurlock was joined by **Jim Goode** (Tuyserkan, 1968 – 71) who co-hosted the discussions.

### f. Oral Histories

PCIA was fortunate to partner with **Dr. Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi**, Professor of History at California State University Fullerton, who focuses her research on the Peace Corps in Iran. Her interest in the Peace Corps in Iran stems from the fact that her father had served as a language trainer. She has conducted 60 interviews which will be archived at the Center for Oral and Public History at California State University Fullerton. Currently access is restricted, but when available visitors (usually students and researchers) will be able to access the recordings. At present about 10 of the interviews have been transcribed. (She noted that AI transcriptions are not all that helpful due to the significant amount of follow-up editing required.)

She has published three academic articles based in part on the interviews, including a book chapter “We Learned How to Be Friends: What Oral History Tells Us about the American Peace Corps in Iran.” (That book is still in process.) An earlier article “The New Frontier Meets the White Revolution: The Peace Corps in Iran, 1962 -1976,” published in *Iranian Studies* 51, no, 4 (2018): 687-612, combined archival documents with oral histories to set the Peace Corps in the context of the Cold War.

Additionally, **Rostam-Kolayi** attended several PCIA conferences where she conducted interviews with PCIA members. In conjunction with **Wangsness**, she presented on her research at the 2019 conference in San Diego in a session titled “Inside Out: Two views of the Peace Corps in Iran” during which she addressed the Peace Corps in Iran from the perspective of the Cold War while Wangsness presented Peace Corps Iran from the perspective of volunteers personal experiences. This is from her online university profile:

Dr. Rostam-Kolayi’s current research project is *Iranians and Americans Engage: Peace Corps Iran, 1962-1976*. She examines the US Peace Corps’ program in Iran through the realms of high diplomacy, social history, and cultural perception. Peace Corps Iran is one of the forgotten episodes of US-Iran relations. In both Iran and the U.S., this almost two-decade-long transnational and cross-cultural engagement of the 1960s and 1970s is scarcely known or remembered. Rather, it has been eclipsed by the tragic events of the Iranian Revolution, the taking of American hostages, and decades of devastating US

sanctions on Iran. Since 1979, narratives of exceptional US-Iran cooperation, exchange, and partnership, such as the Peace Corps program, have been overshadowed by tensions and hostilities verging on war. Though often a witting and unwitting participant in Iran's problematic state-sponsored development projects, Peace Corps Iran's ultimate legacy was to bring together strangers from different national, cultural, and religious backgrounds and forge friendships across borders.

## VI. Finding Iran RPCVs

As it was for earlier associations, a top priority of PCIA was to identify as many Iran RPCVs as possible. Starting with an NPCA list in 2011, which contained about 600 names with mailing addresses, of which about 300 had valid email addresses, invitations to the Portland conference were sent by postcard, email, and regular mail. A grant from the Columbia River Peace Corps Association helped fund these initial projects. In addition, "word of mouth" between Iran RPCVs stimulated a reunion of friendships and resulted in a registration of 300 PCIA members and friends.

As **Wangsness** began her work as historian, she collected trainee booklets from the early groups that had been trained in the US. These booklets are stored in PCIA's digital archives, with originals archived at American University in DC. In 1967 and 1968 Peace Corps began the transition from stateside training to a blended model with the introduction of training first in the U.S, followed by an equal amount of time in Iran. In 1970, training shifted to full-time in Iran. While this was a more effective training model, the downside was that there were no trainee booklets, and with few exceptions, no group lists, complicating **Wangsness's** efforts to identify those who served in the 1970s.

As webmaster and keeper of the data for PCIA, I encountered reports that 1,748 was the total of Iran volunteers, the number posted on the Peace Corps website. In 2018, the Peace Corps shared with NPCA a list of known volunteers. Given access to those listed as having served in Iran, **Wangsness** and I spent several weeks validating and combining that list with our PCIA member spreadsheet. To the best of our knowledge, the result is the most complete list of those who served in Iran. By 2025, after 11 years of searching, we had identified 1,464 volunteers with an additional 50 staff members and 63 trainers for a total of 1,577. While it is doubtful more will be found, occasionally an obituary is found that reports the person had served in Peace Corps Iran, and they are added to the database of names.

In 2024 NPCA changed its database system. In the process of which PCIA no longer had access to volunteer names of those without either an address or email address. Fortunately, we kept a backup of our spreadsheet which means **PCIA now retains the only available list of all who**

**served in Iran.** After PCIA turns out the lights, I will clean up this spreadsheet to delete contact information while preserving names, training groups, years of service and sites in Iran. I will then forward this list to American University's archives.

## **VII. Conferences and Reunions**

The Peace Corps Iran Association planned its first conference/reunion to observe the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peace Corps in Portland in 2011. Conferences were organized in 2013 in Boston, 2015 in Austin, 2017 in Annapolis, 2019 in San Diego, and a Covid era virtual conference was held using Zoom in 2021. With a return to in-person conferences, the 2023 conference was held at the University of Chicago with the last conference in 2025 in Washington, DC.

### **a. 2011—Portland: Reconnect, Reminisce, Revitalize**

The Portland reunion/conference August 5–7 attracted over 300 attendees, including 220 Iran RPCVs. It was supported by the **International Studies Department at Portland State University**, the site for several Iran volunteer training programs. Additionally, the **Columbia River Peace Corps Association** provided a \$600 grant to fund start-up and marketing expenses. The nonprofit **American Iranian Friendship Council**, led by **Goudarz Eghtedari**, served as reunion fiscal agent and also was sponsor of the annual Iranian Festival held concurrently with the conference.

**Jackie Spurlock** and **Genna Wangsness** handled program and other arrangements at Portland State University, while **Doug Schermer** focused on email marketing, registration, budgeting and event details. While organizing the conference, **Spurlock** emphasized the importance of sessions focused on Iran with the goal of inspiring attendees to share their learnings when they returned home.

The Friday program featured breakout sessions on such topics as travel to Iran with tips from **Stephen Kafoury** (Zanjan 1964-66), **Arnie Panitch**, **Gretchen Kafoury**, **Michal Muzikant**, and **Shahla Dorry Kamali**. **Art Wright**, a retired journalism professor shared a video of a 2008 trip to Iran that included **Jackie** and **Mike Spurlock** in the group. Better slide shows was the focus of a session by **Grace Pitzer**. Author readings led by **John Krauskopf** was well attended.

Consistent with **Spurlock's** recommendations to be better informed about contemporary Iran, a special workshop by **Paul and Linda Erickson** (Liberia, 1972-74) on environmental issues in Iran introduced attendees to efforts to save Asiatic cheetahs. This was followed by a documentary, "From Idaho to Iran," by **Marcia Franklin**, a journalist with Idaho Public

Television. This session also included a Skype link with **Shervin Hess**, an environmental researcher and son of **Sam Hess** (Karaj, 1971-73).

University of Texas Austin Professor **Michael Hillmann** lectured on “Iranian Culture and Its Salutary Dualities,” a comparison of Iranian and American cultural characteristics while the current situation in Iran was the topic of a panel discussion featuring **Goudarz Eghtedari** (AIFC) and Santa Clara University Professor **Mary Elaine Hegland** (Mahabad, Gorgan, 1966-68).

Finding peace was the locus of a presentation by **Birol Yesilada**, Portland State, who discussed the multi-track system for conflict resolution he used in the Cyprus peace process.

Saturday’s schedule focused on the annual Iranian Festival held at Portland Park Blocks featuring live music, art, handicrafts, books, food, dancing, fun, and an opportunity to practice Farsi. In the late afternoon, PCIA hosted a reception that included a silent auction, book sale, and a display of historical photos and artifacts organized by **Wangsness**. This was followed by a Persian banquet, featuring Khoreshte Ghormeh Sabzi, Khoreshte Gheimh, Khoreshte Fesenj, Adas Pollo, Shevid Baghale Polo, Masto Khia, Salade Shirazi, and Persian sweets. Live music by Maestro **Hossein Salehi** and his students preceded the keynote speech by **John Limbert**.

Sunday morning featured a Persian breakfast featuring omelet, boiled eggs, nun-e sangak and nun-e lavosh, cheese, butter, jam, khamh, American bread pudding, fruit, chai, and coffee. Next the attendees held an open discussion about reorganization of the Peace Corps Friends of Iran led by **Peter Russell**. A film festival Sunday afternoon closed out the conference program.

For each of the following PCIA conferences, learning about contemporary Iran was a major aspect of the program. However, it could be said that the reunion and rekindling of friendships was a primary reason many attended.

#### **b. 2013—Boston**

A second PCIA conference and reunion was held in Boston June 27-29, 2013, at the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center of the Harvard Medical School, in conjunction with NPCA’s Gathering. **Kendall Dudley** (Sanandaj, Tehran, 1967-69) and **Tom Huf** (Babolsar, Mashhad, Tehran, 1967-71) handled local arrangements. For Iran RPCVs the first session was a Thursday evening World Café-style Conversation at the Boston Commons Hotel focused on the future activities of the new Peace Corps Iran Association. Among the goals listed were:

- form a robust, active membership that includes Iranian- Americans and younger individuals who are not Iran RPCVs
- hold regular meetings or reunions in various parts of the U.S.

- facilitate travel to Iran.
- develop an attractive, informative website.
- collect written memories and other forms of sharing (oral histories, photos) and developing a physical archive for their preservation.
- identifying ongoing, predictable funding sources
- establish connections with other organizations with similar goals facilitating cooperative relationships with Iranian American communities and encouraging creative ideas to further reframe the national dialogue about Iran.

While NPCA events were on the agenda for Friday, on Saturday PCIA was allocated one room to hold a variety of sessions with events held from 9:00 am until 3:30 pm. One highlight was a presentation of Persian Poetry by Iranian students **Maryam Shafiee**, **Negar Pourshadi**, **Moshen Jalali**, and PCIA member **Mostafa Rahbar**. A session on traveling to Iran moderated by **Peter Russell**, included **Ann Taaffe** (Yazd, 1964-66), **Jim Fox** (Tehran, 1965-69) and **Jennifer Seaver** (Rasht, 1966-68). **John Krauskopf** again led an authors' reading session.

When it was discovered that **Negar Pourshadi**, one of the students, was engaged to be married and her parents had been denied visas to come to the U.S. to attend, the PCIA advocacy team quickly drafted a resolution to be sent to John Kerry, then Secretary of State, calling on him to intervene on her behalf. When the wedding day came, her mother was permitted to attend. A wedding picture was included in a subsequent issue of the KhabarNameh.

Saturday evening PCIA members carpooled to the Shiraz Cuisine Restaurant in Watertown for a Persian dinner. Sunday morning a group of volunteers and families toured the Kennedy Library at Columbia Point.

Overall conference participation totaled approximately 60 members.

### c. 2015–Austin—Iran Today: Quest for New Narratives

Two years later, in 2015, a third conference was held from May 28-30 on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, chosen because several volunteer groups had trained there in the 1960s. Members of the Iranian American community were invited to participate, including as presenters. A total of 230 name tags were printed for this event including 145 Iran RPCVs and staff, 62 as Friends of PCIA, 19 presenters, many of whom were Iranian Americans. **Meleia Egger**, a representative from the Washington Peace Corps office, discussed Third Goal activities and introduced us to the Peace Corps Pledge.

This was the first conference at which attempts were made to record several of the presentations. These videos and others from following conferences are available at [www.peacecorpsiran.org](http://www.peacecorpsiran.org) on the “what we do” page.

Conference sessions dealt with a variety of issues. Up first was **William O. Beeman**, University of Minnesota, who addressed the topic of “American views of Iran – Iranian views of America: Symbolic Estrangement in Action.” One breakout session addressed the “two-way gift” focused on the mutual benefits of what volunteers brought back to America led by **Mary Catherine Bateson**, Boston College.

Other sessions discussed cross cultural understandings led by Iranian Americans.

Peace Corps volunteer experiences in Iran were the object of several sessions, including one on the early years and another on the later years. A session on Peace Corps women’s experiences in Iran was for women only. Concurrent sessions featured such topics as women potters in Iran, by **Rahaleh Filsoofi**, Persian art as culture by **Michael Hillmann**, experiencing the revolution by **Mary Elaine Hegland**, and a Farsi refresher, also led by **Hillmann**.

Additional sessions included one by **Thomas Ricks** on Howard Baskerville and Curtis Harnack, one on Terence O’Donnell by **John Lorentz**, one on Persian poetry by **Mostafa Rahbar**, and special session on the Iran Center for Management Studies by several graduates.

Thursday evening featured pizza and films with three concurrent movies in three rooms.

**Hamid Naficy**, Northwestern University, began the Friday morning schedule with a thought-provoking presentation on “Iran’s Mediatic Diplomacy with the West: War by Other Means.” The remainder of the morning was devoted to such topics as travel to Iran by **Tom Ricks**, **John Lorentz**, **Doug Meyer** (Semnan, Karaj, 1967- 68), and **Norma Lee Nichols-Mahdavi** from Iran Custom Travel, and a presentation on Iranian Contemporary Architecture by **Soroush Farzin-Moghadam**, **Naser Shahsavari**, and **Arman Hadilou**. **Meleia Egger** made a presentation on way RPCVs can support Peace Corps’ Third Goal.

Following a box lunch, breakout sessions continued with “Sunni and Shia Views of Figurative Imagery,” by **Tom Klobe** (Alang, Kordkoui, Gorgan, 1964-66). **Anousha Shahsavari**, University of Texas Austin, led a Farsi refresher, while **John Krauskopf** moderated an authors’ reading.

Throughout the afternoon the “Persian Room” was open to the public with a displays and demonstrations of the Peace Cylinder Project by **Rahaleh Filsoofi**, an oriental carpet display from the Kaskas Oriental Rug Gallery, Iranian postage stamps with Iranian cultural content by



**Michael Hillmann**, the PCIA Memorial Book containing obituaries, the Iran RPCV master list shared by **Genna Wangness**, and watercolor painting by **Mostafa Rahbar**.

A highlight of the “Persian Room” was a performance by the Ravaan Persian Dance Group, founded by **Geeti Shirazi Mahajan** in 2012.

The conference culminated Saturday morning with the keynote address by Ambassador **John Limbert** entitled “The Road Back to Tehran: Undoing the last Sixty Years.”

#### **d. 2017–Annapolis–Preserving the Legacy and Advocating the Future**

PCIA’s fourth conference and reunion in 2017 was held in Annapolis October 29–November 1 and was attended by 149 including Iran RPCVs and presenters. The conference began with a panel of experts on the current state of Iranian American affairs that included Ambassador **John Limbert**, **Trita Parsi**, National Iranian American Council; and **Barbara Slavin**, Atlantic Council, moderated by **Tom Huf**.

As in previous conferences, information about contemporary Iran was the focus of a session entitled “The Cyber Crossroads: Poetry, Performance, and Visual Arts in Present Day Iran,” by **Fatemeh Keshavarz**, **Ida Meftahi**, and **Rashin Kheiriyeh** from the University of Maryland’s Roshan Institute.

One session featured Peace Corp’s **Meleia Egger** who led workshops on storytelling and outreach in support of the Third Goal. Among other presentations was a panel consisting of **Col. Bert Rice**, **Stephen Fairbanks** (Shahrud, 1964-66), **Charles Mitchell** (Mahallat, 1974-75), **Robert Stewart** (Somee Sara, Bishe Kola, Shahi, 1974-76), and **Roger Nix** (Bardaskan, Khorasan 1974-76) that recalled horrific events they experienced during the revolution of 1979.

“International Partnerships and Exchange Programs” was the topic of a presentation by **Tom Ricks**, **Peter Deekle** (Borujerd, Natanz, Zahedan 1968-70), **Stephen McInerney**, **Ed Martin**, Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, and **Craig Rinker**.

Tips for preserving documents and photos were provided by **Linda Tompkins-Baldwin**, Digital Maryland Coordinator, and **Susan McElrath**, Archivist at American University.

**Jonathan Pearson**, advocacy coordinator for NPCA, and **Kate Gould** of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, discussed strategies for engaging in constructive advocacy with members of Congress. This was followed by **Kerry Segel’s** (Khonsar, Isfahan, 1969-73) discussion of community engagement to promote better understanding.

A group of members at the conference drafted a resolution in support of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the so-called “nuclear deal.” Approved by acclamation, the resolution stated a core PCIA principle:

We strongly support diplomacy as the primary means for the United States and the international community to resolve issues of mutual interest with Iran and to prevent further military conflict in the region.

In a commentary on “advocating the future,” PCIA President **Carolyn Yale** wrote:

I once again encourage our members and readers to advocate for understanding with Iran and its people—not in the political sense so much as in conveying a sympathetic appreciation for the culture, history and prospects for renewed amity between our people.

I believe this is done readily not by arguing but by simpler and far less stressful means: shifting the conversation to topics—culture, family, travel and so forth—that are inviting rather than threatening, and sympathetic rather than confrontational.

#### **e. 2019 –San Diego-Modern Mosaics: Iran, America, Peace Corps Interconnections**

PCIA’s 2019 conference, held October 4–6 in San Diego, attracted 167 participants and was held in San Diego with special guest, journalist **Jason Rezaian**, who discussed being imprisoned in Tehran. Rezaian’s first contact with PCIA and initial invitation to come to a conference was in 2014 in a Tehran hotel lobby where a small group of PCIA members were staying while touring in Iran. On July 22, 2014, while serving as Tehran bureau chief for The Washington Post, he was arrested by Iranian authorities and held until January 16, 2016. His co-panelist was Ambassador **John Limbert**, who was taken hostage on November 4, 1979, during the crisis at the U.S. Embassy, and held until January 20, 1981.

This conference introduced attendees to the topic of the Iranian Diaspora during a presentation by **Persis Karim**, Director of the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies at San Francisco State University. With a focus on informing Americans about Iran, **Carolyn Yale** led a workshop on using the PBS program, “Our Man in Tehran,” with PCIA-developed discussion guides. “Bam 6.6.” by **Jahangir Golestan**, about the kindness shown to two Americans caught in the 2003 Bam earthquake was a featured film.

**Matthew Shannon**, Associate professor at Emory & Henry College, offered a presentation on American missionaries in Iran. The first arrived in 1833, when **Justin Perkins**, a Presbyterian minister, set sail for Qajar Iran. He was sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and focused his work on the Assyrian Church of the East in northwestern Iran.

One of missionaries was **Howard Baskerville**, who died during the 1905 revolution. These missionaries established hospitals in cities, including Tabriz, Hamadan, and Mashhad and schools in Tehran and other cities.

Saturday evening featured a staged reading of the award-winning play, *The Orange Garden*, by Joanna Garner, daughter of Iran RPCV **Steve Horowitz** (Maragheh, Rasht, 1968-71).

The advocacy team drafted a resolution in which PCIA reaffirmed the 2017 resolution in support of the JCPOA and called for the UN to implement measures to increase security in the region, called on the US to revoke its “Muslim ban,” facilitate people-to-people exchanges in the areas of education, science, sport, academia, art, and other fields. This supplemented a session on “The Future of our Advocacy and Impact Efforts,” with **Paul Barker** (Bidokht, Shiraz, Tehran, 1971-76), and **Carolyn Yale**.

**Shahrokh Yadegari** showcased *Scarlet Stone*, a multi-disciplinary piece, a commentary on the past 40 years of political history of Iran based on an adaptation of poetry from the *Shahnameh* and Siavash Kasrai’s *Mohreye Sorkh*.

Travel to Iran was again on the program with a panel that included **Jackie Spurlock**, **Paul Barker**, **Nora Barker** (Bahrain, 1976-78) and **Joel Montague**, who helped train Iran 1 volunteers.

“Persian Language: Connections and Recollections,” led by **Kerry Segel** included poetry recitations and commentary by **Mostafa Rahbar**, **John Limbert**, **Tagi Sagafi-Nejad**, and **Richard Eaton** (Tabriz, 1962-64). **Segel** read from his translation of the “KhonsarNameh” by Dr. M. H. Tasbihi in which “Kerry Segel” appears several times, the only known mention of a Peace Corps Volunteer in Persian literature. **Segel** followed up with articles in the *KhabarNameh* featuring translations from Tasbihi’s memoir.

#### f. 2021-PCIA Adapts to the Zoom Era

During the Covid 19 era, PCIA made use of Zoom to share information about Iran and promote a better understanding. PCIA celebrated Nowruz 2021 using Zoom in three locations. NPCA played a key role by providing both Zoom connections and technical support. The program featured Oregon resident **Terry Hashemi** who gave a tour of her *Haft Sin* table. She showed items beginning with the “s” sound that had special significance for her family. **Mostafa Rahbar**, who resides in Knoxville, Tennessee, recited Persian poetry using his sonorous voice. **Mary Hegland** located in California, an anthropologist who lived in an Iranian village, lead a discussion of Nowruz.

**Steve Horowitz** was featured on an April 2021 PCIA “Special Zoom Event” in which he read from his collection of stories. One of his favorite activities is giving readings of his stories, especially “Donkeys, Dervishes and the Borderline.” His stories have been posted on the PCIA website and in John Krauskops’ *Anthologies*.

PCIA used Zoom to host a virtual conference on October 2, 2021, with a theme of “Looking Back to a Path Forward.” Again, NPCA provided a professional level Zoom connection and technical support. Under “looking back,” **John Ghazvinian**, author of *America and Iran: A History, 1720 to the Present*, was the featured presenter. The “path forward” featured a panel featuring **John Limbert**, **Sina Toossi**, National Iranian American Council, and **Bahman Bakhtiar**, Baskerville Institute. Other presenters included **Joan Gaughan** who discussed her book *The Shuster Mission to Iran* and **Tom Ricks** who focused on Howard Baskerville.

**g. 2023—Chicago—Understanding Iran Today: Fulfilling our Mission—Ensuring our Legacy,”**

The return to in-person conferences came Memorial Day Weekend, May 25-27, 2023, when 123 people gathered at the David Rubenstein Forum at the University of Chicago. One conference highlight was a visit to the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (previously the Oriental Institute) where attendees saw artifacts in the museum, learned about ganats, and viewed old films from Persepolis when it was excavated by teams from the Oriental Institute in the 1930s.

**Paul Barker** led a panel on “Understanding Iran Today” that included **Benham Ben Taleblu**, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, Ambassador **John Limbert**, and **Assal Rad**, researcher and author on modern Iran.

Also on the program was a panel of Iranian Americans who had served as trainers, including **Vida Boubour**, **Ali Fakharzadeh**, **Parvaneh Limbert**, **Mostafa Rahbar**, **Tagi Sagifi-Nejad**, and **Hossein Aghai**. A panel organized by **Kerry Segel** featured ways to use arts and literature to enhance cultural understanding. Panelists featured **Cameron Cross**, Professor of Persian Literature, University of Michigan, **Paul Sprachman**, Professor emeritus, Rutgers University; **Pooneh Shabani-Jadidi**, Professor of Persian, University of Chicago; and **Narimon Safavi**, Commentator on WBEZ, Chicago’s NPR station.

**h. 2025—Washington, DC—Past Reflection and Future Vision**

PCIA held its last reunion and conference at the Martin Luther King Jr. Public Library in Washington, DC, October 3–5, 2025. Led by co-chairs **Skip Auld** (Mahallat, 1973-74) and **Brad Hanson** (Khaf, Shiraz Tribal School, 1973-76), the opening reception on Friday evening featured

former congressman **Joe Kennedy III**, who had served in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic from 2004 to 2006.

The conference continued with a Saturday morning kickoff featuring speaker **Donna Shalala** (Mollasani, 1962-64), a member of Group 1, followed by a panel of Group 1 Volunteers including **John Lorentz** (Karaj, 1962-64), **Allen Clutter** (1962-61, Mashhad), **Richard Eaton** (Tabriz, 1962-64), **Jeff Gritzner** (Ahwaz, 1962-64), and **Jack Huxtable** (Rezaiyeh, 1962-64), who reflected on their experiences.

Attendees also viewed the film “When We Grew Together,” by **Abbas Ahmadi Motlagh** and **Hossein Mahallati**, featuring interviews with Iran RPCVs talking about their experiences in Iran.

Several sessions focused on Iran and Persian culture. Iranian nomads—past, present, and future—was the topic for one breakout session led by **Brad Hanson** and **Ashkbous Talebi** while a parallel breakout session featured reading Khayyamic Quatrains poetically led by **Michael Hillmann** and **Kerry Segel**. In addition, **Segel**, **Farzaneh Milani**, and **Persis Karim** addressed the life and legacy of Forough-e Farrokhzad. **Persis Karim** also presented a film about the Persian Diaspora, “The Dawn is too Far.”

**Yeganeh Torbati**, **Narimnn Safavi**, and **Elham Gheytonchi** shared their insights about women and protests in Iran. **Andy Mott** (Shiraz, 1965-67) led a session which included **Ezra Tzfadya** and **Myriam Sabbaghi** on responses to threats to the Iranian diaspora. Changes in the Persian language in the last 50 years was the topic for presentation by **Kamran Talattof**, **Richard Eaton**, and **Kerry Segel**.

Advocacy for peace was emphasized in a panel discussion about Iran today and the way forward for diplomatic openings whose members included **John Limbert**, **Barbara Slavin**, **Trita Parsi**, and **Sina Toossi**.

With the decision to dissolve in 2026, sessions on the future of PCIA included a look at legacy projects such as placing documents at the American University archives and artifacts at the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience, as well as the possibility of using NPCA resources for communication and involvement.

Sunday evening brought the reunion to a close with a Persian banquet catered by Joon's, a nationally rated restaurant. Prior to dinner, cookbook author **Najmieh Batmanglij**, who inspired the restaurant, gave a greeting before returning to the kitchen “to make sure everything was done right.” A surprise guest for the evening was **Jason Rezaian**, the Washington Post reporter who

had been incarcerated for 544 days in Evin Prison and was on the program for the 2019 conference in San Diego.

**Jody Olsen**, former Peace Corps Director, gave an inspiring address about her experiences as a volunteer in Tunisia from 1966-68 and her long career at the Peace Corps serving in multiple leadership positions, including Director from 2018 to 2021.

#### **i. 2016 to 2019–PCIA Members Present at Other Conferences**

2016 saw several PCIA members making presentations at conferences sponsored by other organizations. At the National Peace Corps Association conference, **John Krauskopf**, **Kendall Dudley**, **Alex Patico** (Firuzkuh, 1968-69), and **Jennifer B.C. Seaver** focused their comments on Iran. The Atlantic Council hosted a symposium on Iran that included **Tom Huf**, **John Limbert**, and **Tom Ricks** on the program. At the biennial conference of the International Society for Iranian Studies held in Vienna, Austria, a panel, entitled “Peace Corps Volunteers in Iran: Witnesses to the 1960s,” was organized by **Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi**, Associate Professor, California State University Fullerton, that included Iran RPCVs **Mary Elaine Hegland**, **John Lorentz**, and **Tom Ricks**.

In 2019 PCIA members **Skip Auld**, **Jackie Spurlock**, **Jeanette Gottlieb** and **John Limbert** participated in the grand opening on September 22<sup>nd</sup> of the REACH center at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, as part of an NPCA contribution to the program. **John Limbert** provided some introductory remarks which were followed by a presentation of PCIA’s “Our Man in Tehran” project. In addition, **Skip Auld** arranged for PCIA to sponsor the play “Iran Today and Aloud” performed by Quartet Studios which included two Iranian musicians, **Behfar Bahadoran** on tar and percussion, and **Pedram Hosseini** on tombac. In addition, **Jeanette Gottlieb** supervised a table display featuring information about PCIA. This event—focused on the Peace Corps in general—featured a showing of *A Towering Task*, which included interviews with some Iran RPCVs that PCIA helped locate for the documentarian.

Also in 2019, PCIA received the Loret Miller Ruppe Award for Outstanding Community Service from NPCA, sharing this award with the New York City Peace Corps Association. The award, named after Peace Corps’ 10<sup>th</sup> Director (1981-89), recognizes PCIA members who are working to “boost opportunities for cultural exchanges, political activism, constructive advocacy, and cultural diplomacy.”

### **VIII. The Third Goal: Toward a Better Understanding**

PCIA put the Third Goal of the Peace Corps (To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans) into practice in several ways. Several examples of this are described below.

### a. Facebook

Third Goal activities began with Facebook in 2011 as a follow-up to the Portland conference and decision to formally organize as a nonprofit corporation. **Jackie Spurlock** served as the group administrator throughout. There are two separate Facebook entities, a ‘group’ for PCIA members and a ‘page’ for the general public.

The PCIA Facebook group is a community where people come together to connect, learn, and share about Iran. One must apply and be accepted into the group, so many are RPCVs and former staff, although that is not required. The Facebook group has over 500 members. The topics discussed are about Iran or Peace Corps. People post photos of their Peace Corps days or share current articles about Iran issues.

**Spurlock** also moderates a Facebook page that is completely different. Open to the whole world, the page is used to post articles, photos, and information that show the stunning, beautiful, interesting, and positive side of Iran. According to **Spurlock** “the page is where we are able to carry out our mission of helping improve mutual understanding between Americans and Iranians, because most users on the page are not former Peace Corps volunteers or staff. They are usually people who are curious about Iran.”

### b. Presentations to school and civic groups

**Jackie Spurlock** described how she gives a presentation to a civic group (she has presented at more than 22 Rotary Clubs as well as churches and retirement centers).

My general experience was always a high level of interest from an engaged audience, asking good questions. I learned it is important to stick to the allotted amount of time. Trying to include every detail is impossible and people get bored. A good map is essential. I included photos of people who look modern and happy, but I also spoke about life there right now (as best I could, not really knowing).

I especially liked talking to Rotary clubs, as they are usually well-informed, with a wide variety of opinions, but libraries gave a good cross-section of the community too.

I always started with one or two photos of Mike and me in the Peace Corps and talked about that experience a bit, then moved into current photos of the people. Then after my 2019 trip with Code Pink, I showed photos of that experience—meeting with Javad Zarif and visiting Parliament while it was in session. Always a few photos of the stunning natural and cultural beauty, Isfahan, etc. Then I finished by asking rhetorically, “What about women in Iran?” and showing 4 or 5 photos of different types of *hijab*, from a light

scarf falling off the back of an attractive woman's head, to a fuller scarf covering all the hair, to a full-on chador.

**Bill Brandon**, as have many RPCVs, spoke to students in both high schools and universities.

In the late 1990s, Charlotte Area RPCV group organized its members to go speak to schools about their Peace Corps experiences as part of a NPCA program to foster the celebrations in the first week of March around the founding of the Peace Corps. I went to schools (junior high/upper elementary school) two or three different years.

I also have been invited to speak a number of times about Iran/Middle East as part of the Great Decisions program sponsored here by the local World Affairs Council; often other local groups would then have some of the speakers reprise their talks in those groups. One Great Decisions talk to a "Senior Scholars Group" was: "Future of Persian Gulf Security." Conservatively, I've given such talks at least 5 times; audiences probably varied from 75 to 125.

**Joan Gaughan** did more than a one-time speaking engagement when she taught a full class.

Quite a few years ago, I taught a class for an Adult Learners group on modern Iran from the Safavids to Ahmadinejad. It went over quite well especially since it was scheduled during March, and I could treat them to a Nowruz Haft Seen.

**Carolyn Yale** used the PBS program, "Our Man in Tehran" which featured Thomas Erdbrink, a journalist for the New York Times living in Iran who produced the video focused on the lives of ordinary people to introduce Iran to American audiences. As she explained it:

... "third goal" activities really took shape during the period when the Obama administration was working on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to contain Iranian nuclear ambitions. I prepared materials for PCIA members who were interested in local presentations. At the time, we used a video, "Our Man in Tehran," to introduce the audience to everyday Iran and Iranians, avoiding thorny political issues. I do not have stats on the total number of presentations overall but know I sent copies of "Our Man" to at least 6 PCIA members. I personally gave several presentations at a retirement home and held two home-based meetings with friends and friends of friends.

**Genna Wangsness** had shared many of her experiences with a variety of groups where she lives in Florida.

- In 2023 I gave a well-attended talk about my experiences as a PCV in Iran to the residents at my sister's assisted living facility. Roger and Alison were there. I shared a box of GAZ with the attendees—Persian Nougat (Gaz/Gas) in a one-pound window box. They were popular, one couple stuffing some into their pockets! Amazon sells them and they are quite good.



- I was invited to speak in February 2024 before the Iranian American Society of Daytona Beach. A large number of the society's members gathered in a venue owned by an Iranian couple. Other society members participated via Zoom. Pastries from a local Iranian restaurant, Soraya Cafe, were provided by the society. An Iranian professor from DeLand's Stetson University was in attendance with her husband. A couple who served with PC in another country (I don't recall which) attended, as did members of my family. Among the Iranian attendees was a woman proud to have been an airline stewardess who flew for IranAir and was assigned to the Shah's plane. The society's president was from Sari where he knew PCVs when he was a child; at least 30 PCVs served in Sari.
- Our daughter Alison, who was born in Tehran in 1968, now lives in Ocala, Florida. At her main library Roger and I set up a display on two tables of items related to Iran, most of them having been brought home from Iran. Alison gave a presentation on our Peace Corps experiences and her experiences in Iran following her birth. Attendees were quite interested, asking Roger and me many questions about the country, current politics, etc. One attendee was a woman who worked in Iran for TWA.

#### c. Radio and Internet

In addition to presentations to live audiences noted above to promote the Third Goal, the medium of radio and internet was used by **Steve Horowitz** and **Stephen Gottlieb** (Shiraz 1965-67) to share their opinions on various topics. As host of "Small Town, Big World" on the local public "radio" station in Ellensburg, Oregon., which uses the internet rather than the airwaves, **Horowitz** hosted programs to further international understanding. One program featured a discussion of his Peace Corps service in Iran. You could listen to it at <https://soundcloud.com/eburgradio-org/stbw-ep11-steve-horowitz-iran>

**Gottlieb**, a constitutional scholar at Albany Law School, shared his views on national and international topics including US-Iran relations, on local public radio station WAMC in Albany, NY. His commentaries were available at <https://www.wamc.org/tags/stephen-gottlieb/>

#### d. Classroom teachers

It was common for RPCVs to become teachers. Equally common was to share stories from our Peace Corps experiences with our students. **Tom Hughes** (Zabol, 1968-69) his book, *Iran and Me, All of Us, Actually*, explained that the headmaster at his Long Island School hired him by stating, "If you've survived teaching in Iran, then you can handle anything." Tom added that he did that by bringing Iran into his classroom. Often his stories served as a reward when students remained on task and completed the lesson ahead of time. "Fortunately, I never ran out of stories," said Tom in his book.

**Leslie Miller** (Mashhad, 1964-66) shared with the author the following from her experience while teaching fourth grade in Boston.

... Metrowest Boston, we were a town attracting immigrants. One year, an Iranian family joined our school. The young son was very uncomfortable and scared. He spoke no English. Someone remembered that I had lived in Iran. Enough Farsi remained in my poor brain, so I was able to translate for this young son and help him become comfortable and begin to learn English. The family ultimately had two sons in our school. We learned much from them. The Grandparents had gone to California a year or two before and did come to visit. Unfortunately, the grandmother, going home, was on one of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers. My whole school, the town, mourned for this family.

But in my school, the questioning about the country of Iran had begun.

Our New Year came upon us. Some of my students asked how I celebrated New Year in Iran. I told them that we Americans celebrated our New Year, but Iran celebrated Nowruz at the Spring Solstice. AND... then the idea began to form.

I conferred with a few of my colleagues and got permission from the principal. Finally, a few days were planned for slide shows and discussions, using all the artifacts and other things I had brought home. (I collect. Many things.)

The children and parents who attended did plant some seeds in little eggshells to take home and grow for their *Haft Sin*.

The next day the fourth graders were invited to an Iranian feast. We were not allowed to have a fire to jump over, but the children and their parents knew about it from my talks and slides. (How I wish those slides had not faded.)

The PCIA website, [www.peacecorpsiran.org](http://www.peacecorpsiran.org), provided a means to communicate to the world about Iran and the activities of PCIA. Website statistics indicated that it has been accessed from many countries around the world. It was not uncommon for an email to be sent to “contact us” asking for more information about individual Peace Corps Volunteers. This resulted in several email reconnections between volunteers and their friends in Iran. One reunion, as reported at <https://peacecorpsiran.org/stories/>, involves **Paul Levering** (Dezful, 1964-67) who was sought by one of his English students, **Ezzat Goushegir**, a playwright living in Chicago. Another reunion was featured on CBS Morning News on February 14, 2020, when **Lynn Meena** (Abadan, Rasht, 1964-66) was greeted by former student, **Iran Kashkooli**, in San Francisco, 56 years after Lynn’s service ended. This reunion is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJD-HaCZqys>.

## IX. Advocating for Peace

Not known to be shy, Iran RPCVs had a history of expressing their views in public forums, letters to the editor, and contacting Congressional representatives. The PCIA Board sent its first letter to President Obama in 2013 urging “peaceful and diplomatic solutions to the differences that challenge our countries.” PCIA consistently supported the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) designed to contain nuclear development in Iran that could potentially lead to a nuclear warhead.

**Jonathan Pearson**, Advocacy Coordinator, National Peace Corps Association, and **Kate Gould**, Friends Committee on National Legislation, shared effective strategies to communicate with members of Congress at the 2017 Annapolis Conference. In 2019, PCIA adopted a resolution on “Supporting Peacemaking with Iran” which reaffirmed PCIA’s commitment to peace by calling on the U.S. and Iran to “abjure war and return to diplomacy” and uphold the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to limit the risk of nuclear war.

In support of Iran RPCVs commitment to peace, PCIA’s **Advocacy Bulletin** was a monthly e-newsletter edited by **Paul Barker** which started with his comments on current Iran-US relations before providing a lengthy list of links to articles of interest to PCIA members. These were published in advance of PCIA’s **Fourth Monday** discussion group which took place on Zoom and was hosted by **Barker** and **Brad Hanson**. (Barker intends to continue this after PCIA finishes the dissolution process.)

**Barker**, wrote:

It is going on 9 years now that I have been editing the *Advocacy Bulletin*, hoping to give our members information and tools to support their advocacy interests and efforts relating to Iran. I have indeed written op-eds and a fair number of letters to the editor on our advocacy priorities over the years. I write to our members of congress fairly often to share my views on Iran related advocacy priorities. Also, I have a PowerPoint presentation on Iran (and another one on Afghanistan) that I have periodically updated and shared with different venues, including schools, churches, meetings, and forums related to international affairs, mainly in Oregon but also once in Juneau, Alaska.

One example of **Barker’s** advocacy activities was a slideshow presentation titled “Iran: Engaging with Iran in The Era of Trump” which aired on community television via Open Signal in Portland. Also, he posted a slide show on YouTube available for viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKuw9L05K5c>.

**Hanson** added that:

My Iran-related activities have mainly revolved around advocacy, writing occasional action alerts and articles for Paul’s Advocacy Bulletin, advocating with my Congressman

and Senators, including two face-to-face meetings with my Congressman, who was Obama's political appointee as Ambassador to Switzerland, the US protecting power in Tehran in the absence of diplomatic relations.

## **X. Working with Iranians in the U.S.**

One common experience of Peace Corps Volunteers in Iran was the hospitality of the people. An opportunity to reciprocate came following the 1979 revolution when many Iranian students were stranded at U.S. universities without emotional and financial support. **John Krauskopf** met with several college officials to help them understand and address the cultural needs of these students.

**Carolyn Yale** worked with **Dr. Persis Karim**, the founding director of Persian Studies at San Jose State University and the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies. Karim was a speaker at the San Diego conference in 2019 and the 2025 conference in Washington, DC.

## **XI. Travel to Iran**

As described earlier, initial Iran RPCV trips to Iran began in 1999 and continued in 2002, organized by NPCA and the Friendship Force.

Several issues of the *KhabarNameh* contained articles in a column titled, "Beya Beream," by **David Shannon** (Saneh, Kermanshah, 1974-76), which featured stories about travel to Iran.

Although organizing travel to Iran was not an emphasis of PCIA, it was encouraged. In 2016 NPCA organized another tour to Iran. **John Krauskopf** participated as the official PCIA representative and the only Iran RPCV on the trip. He enhanced the tour by explaining aspects of Iranian history and culture from his perspective as an Iran RPCV.

It should be noted that independent of a RPCV organization, several Iran RPCVs returned to Iran on group and occasionally solo trips. A few can be noted here:

**Jeff** and **Yvonne Gritzner** helped organize a trip by the Montana Geographic Alliance, a network of educators ranging from kindergarten teachers to university professors. Gritzner reported on the follow-up activities in support of Goal Three:

In 2000, I returned to Iran with thirty-one Montana teachers and academic administrators who would spend two weeks investigating the geography, history, art, and culture of this vibrant country. The National Geographic Society provided financial support for the Summer Institute, and Iran Discovery Tours arranged transportation and accommodations. Talks by Iranian scholars and on-site specialists enhanced our stay.

As a result, Montana schools boast a considerable number of lesson plans and in-service and pre-service workshops related to Iran. Emerging from Peace Corps experience, the institute clearly contributed to the fulfillment of its goals to promote a better understanding of Americans by others and a better understanding of others by Americans.

**John Lorentz** spent two years researching for his PhD thesis and teaching at the University of Tehran. He also has served as a scholar on private tours.

In 2014 the travel agency Distant Horizons organized a tour led by **Tom Ricks** with visits to Tehran, Mashhad, Shiraz, Kerman, Yazd, Isfahan, and the Caspian Sea. Tom had organized prior trips, one of which included two volunteers from Group One—**Dick Eaton and Jack Huxtable** (Rezaiyeh, 1962-64).

**Stephen Kafoury** made an emotional return to Iran as reported in the KhabarNameh under the headline of “Finding My Peace Corps Family after Forty Years.”

We then turned northwest for the emotional high point of my trip. I had arranged to see the family with whom I had been close during my Peace Corps years. Two men met us at our hotel in Zanjan, and although one was fourteen and the other eight when I saw them last, I recognized them immediately. I was truly touched by their reaction. I was kissed on both cheeks many times and tears flowed freely.

We toured the town, which had quadrupled in size, and visited the house where I had stayed and the school where I had taught. The horse-drawn wagons and donkeys were replaced with automobiles and much of the old adobe construction was replaced by new brick buildings. Yet the bazaar and the historic area surrounding it had been preserved.

I spent several hours in the same family home where I had been a guest so many years ago. My Farsi and their English combined to allow sufficient communication for a joyful reunion. My journey was complete.

A private tour for Iran RPCVs in 2014, organized by **Philip Price** (Shooshtar, 1972-75), featured a 14 night/15-day tour to Tehran, Hamadan, Shiraz, Yazd and Isfahan. Upon his return, Phillip reported on this encounter in Isfahan.

**Doug Schermer**, a fellow traveler in our group told a man of the experiences of several of our group as Peace Corps volunteers. The man listened in silence, but his head shot up at the mention of the Peace Corps. He stopped the speaker and apologized for interrupting, but he had something to share—something which was clearly bursting from his chest.

He had been a student in a village outside Shiraz where a Peace Corps volunteer was stationed in the early 1970s. His “mister” was an English teacher who had inspired this man to become an English teacher himself. He had just retired from that 40-year career

and was on a vacation with his wife. He looked at us all with eyes filled with tears of gratitude and wonder, and thanked us profusely for all we had, through association, given him and inspired in him. He insisted on pictures that would commemorate this auspicious occasion, as when he returned to his village, he was sure no one would believe him.

**Carolyn Yale** reported on her visit to Iran in the KhabarNameh with these words:

My diary entry for August 4, reads, “We are now in Tehran—for me, once again in Tehran.” This was my return to Iran after Peace Corps service in Shiraz in the mid-1970s, and this time the mission, in the company of three scientists, one former astronaut, and seven other fellow travelers, was a “solar” lecture tour of western Iran capped by viewing a total eclipse. How convenient that Isfahan, with a 96% probability of clear skies in summer, lay in the path of totality! And how fortunate that I was included in this delegation with my physicist husband, Rock Bush. The three of our group who had lived in Iran were eager to revisit and, viewing the politics of that summer with trepidation, hoped that Iranian hospitality would smooth any rough spots. As it turned out, the hospitality and interest in Americans exceeded all expectations.

In 2001 **Dave Devine** wrote about his solo trip to Iran to visit Zahedan, capital of Baluchistan, *Persian Mosaic: Getting Back to Iran After 25 Years*. His story combines memories of his Peace Corps service with the changes he saw on his return.

**Jackie Spurlock** has returned to Iran three times since 2006. Her third trip was with Code Pink, an active women’s peace group. They met with Foreign Minister Javad Zarid and toured the Parliament, which was in session.

## **XII. Succession Planning**

Aware of the impact of the aging of PCIA members and the challenge to maintain current activities with existing personnel and resources, in October 2020 the Board organized 28 volunteers into task forces and began working with Telesto Strategy consultants on a thorough analysis of the Association’s organizational status with a focus on succession planning. Telesto sent questionnaires to all members which guided the decision-making process which involved five workgroups over two years.

Members of the task force included: **Paul Barker, Bill Brandon, Kendall Dudley, Joan Gaughan, Jeanette Gottlieb, Jeff Gritzner, Yvonne Gritzner, Jack Hannula, Thomas Huf, Chuck Kaminski, John Krauskopf, Fraser Lang, John Limbert, Joe Mangi, JoAnn Meyer, Douglas Meyer, Marie Mitchell, Ken Opin, Carol Posey (deceased), John Salamack, Doug Schermer, Kerry Segel, Edmund Seiders, Bill Spielberger, Robert Spitz, Jackie Spurlock, Don Wendel, and Carolyn Yale.**

When done, the board identified four “end points.”

One option addressed ways to expand membership. An initial focus was to seek younger members, especially the children and grandchildren of Iran RPCVs who likely were aware of PCIA. Also considered was establishing partnerships with universities with Persian language programs and inviting students to join PCIA. In addition, involving Iranian Americans in leadership positions was explored.

A second approach involved partnering with like-minded organizations that shared similar values and goals for a potential merger. After much research, two were identified: the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) would have been a natural partner to carry on PCIA’s advocacy work and the Baskerville Institute, based on its cultural focus. Both groups were judged to be a good fit with PCIA members.

A third approach involved establishing an endowment as a financial legacy to promote PCIA’s mission and legacy through such means as sponsored lectures at conferences or displays at museums focused on the work of PC volunteers in Iran. There did not appear to be the likelihood of raising sufficient funds for such an endowment.

A final approach, “planned phaseout” in which PCIA would “sunset” as an organization and urge members to join other organizations such as those mentioned in the second option above. PCIA, as a nonprofit organization, would unincorporate and fade away. Historical documents and artifacts, including copies of publications and a complete download of the website would be donated to American University and/or the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. It would no longer be possible to sustain the website and Blackbaud email service, although digital records would be preserved for future researchers.

After much discussion at the 2025 conference in Chicago, the final conclusion was that PCIA would hold a final reunion and conference in Washington, DC, in October 2025, and then begin the process of phasing out.

After two years of study and evaluation, the PCIA Board concluded that the “planned phaseout” approach was the better choice with June 30, 2026, as the end-date.

Paul Barker provided this summary of PCIA activities in the October 2025 Advocacy Bulletin:

The Peace Corps closed its office in Tehran on 30 June 1976, bringing to an end a 14-year program in which 1,748 American volunteers taught English and vocational education, worked in city planning roles, served in agricultural and forestry extension, ran

community development projects, and some even played in the Tehran Symphony Orchestra.

While Peace Corps Iran closed over 49 years ago, the impact of that service has lived on in the memories of volunteers and their friends in Iran and America. Over the past fifteen years those memories have been nurtured by the Peace Corps Iran Association. It has taken life in the Association's newsletters and conferences, in books authored by PCIA members, in an Iran-focused book club, and through advocacy efforts. Alas all of these RPCVs are getting older, leading to a decision to close PCIA on 30 June 2026 and to hold one last PCIA conference in Washington DC from 3-5 October 2025. BBC Persian was there and prepared [this story](#) of our event.

As part of the 2025 conference, co-chair **Brad Hanson** led a team in the development of a souvenir booklet. The result was titled "Yadegari," which means memories in Persian. **Genna Wansgness, Joan Gaughan, Doug Schermer, and Allison Wangsness Clement** joined Hanson to produce a colorful document which included highlights from PCIA activities and things about Iran that resided in collective memories, including Persian phrases and poetry.

In January 2026, the PCIA board began working on the details for dissolution of PCIA as a nonprofit in Oregon with a goal of June 30 as the final date for official PCIA activities. As part of the dissolution process, the board engaged the Center for Nonprofit Law, an Oregon firm, that specializes in nonprofit issues. A formal resolution of dissolution and plan of dissolution, as required by Oregon law, were approved by the board on April 20. This called for the distribution of remaining funds to be distributed to other 501(c)3 nonprofits. The board selected the National Peace Corps Association; the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience; the Peace Corps Foundation DBA Peace Corps Commemorate/Foundation, which was developing a Peace Corps memorial in Washington, DC; American University, University Library Archives and Special Collections; and the National American Iranian Council.

Although plans for dissolution were in the works, PCIA continued to be active, especially in response to the US-Israel war against Iran begun in February 2026. Although Paul Barker published his "last *Advocacy Bulletin*, the war prompted him to issue subsequent "special" editions in which he offered his personal thoughts and shared links to other postings.

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, the PCIA board, in keeping with its mission to promote peace and mutual understanding, issued a special statement condemning the war:

Fifty years ago (between 1962 and 1976) we served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Iran. We worked in Iranian schools and offices. We lived in Iranian communities. We earned salaries comparable to those of our Iranian counterparts. We learned to speak Farsi and to



appreciate the depths of Iranian friendship and hospitality. Some of us even married Iranians. Our love and appreciation of many things Iranian has endured over the decades.

We know enough history to know that our country has sometimes been a strong ally and sometimes a foolish enemy of Iranian national aspirations for a better life with dignity, freedom and prosperity. We are pained to witness now some of the worst strands of that history repeated and amplified. Our country has become the major party to a war of choice against Iran, launched in defiance of American laws and the US Constitution as well as international laws and structures. The war is highly destabilizing to regional and likely global economic and political security.

We are deeply sympathetic to the aspirations of the Iranian people for a government that reflects the values animating recent anti-government demonstrations: Women's rights, life and freedom (*zan, zendigi, azadi*). We are also deeply aware of the limitations of American military power when it comes to affecting positive change in foreign societies. We are mindful of the costs to international order when laws and conventions are willfully violated. We know that it is easy to blow things up, and ever so complicated to create and build on solid foundations for a better future.

April 2026 saw the last official issue of the KhabarNameh with a planned "KhodaHafez" or "Good-bye" issue scheduled for June as the last email sent from [www.peacecorpsiran.org](http://www.peacecorpsiran.org).

There are some who had chosen to engage in PCIA inspired activities after June 30. John Krauskopf and others planed to publish a second, and final, anthology of Peace Corps Iran Volunteer stories privately. Kerry Segel intended to publish translations of his Iran mentor and life-long friend Mr./Dr. M.H. Tasbihib journals. Bill Bradley had set up a means for volunteers to publish articles, with Substack. Marcia Franklin and Brad Hanson plan to continue a zoom book club focused on Iran, which may also address Persian films. While the PCIA Facebook page ended, NPCA offered an Iran RPCV group on Peace Corps Connect+ which has similar features.

Nevertheless, official Peace Corps Iran Association activities terminated June 30, 2026. Additional "wrap up" activities continued through July.

## AND IN CONCLUSION

Iran Peace Corps Volunteers served in Iran in the years 1962-1976. After coming home, they continued their service in support of the Peace Corps' Third Goal: "To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans" by organizing three affiliates of the National Peace Corps Association. The longest serving of these was the Peace Corps Iran Association which commenced in 2011 and was active until (2026). While one factor in the

success of PCIA was the use of Internet technology to enhance communication, the most significant factor was the commitment of its members and leaders to fulfill the mission. That said, these members and leaders of PCIA had aged considerably prompting the decision to “turn out the lights” in 2026. Physical and digital evidence of PCIA would remain at the American University, the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience, and in the hearts and memories of its members and their descendants.

In the first lines of her poem, “A Last Pass of the Wine,” **Carolyn Yale** captured the sentiments of this author as he contemplated the loss of PCIA and the comradery of these past 15 years.

We move slowly these days,  
bent as if weathering a prevailing wind.  
Over years the seasons have lost their rhythm.  
Long winters have starved the promises of spring.  
Will there come a time when summer is forgotten?

We are 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.