Happy New Year

- There Is No Quarantine...
- Children in Need
- The Science of Nutrition, Facts about cholesterol
- Fatty Liver
- Tavalod
- Revisiting Septembers of Shiraz
- 2016 Iranian American Women Leadership Conference, San Diego
- How does it feel to be a second class citizen?
There Is No Quarantine...

Foremost, warm and best wishes for 2016. Every two months when it’s time to write this editorial, I do a figure 8 - round and round as to what to tackle. A few days ago, Ali Sadr and I were talking about the two editorials, the times and all that is happening in our world. I suggested that he use this space for translation of his Persian Editorial, and then came an email with an article written in The Guardian by Professor Ahmad Sadri at Lake Forest College titled “Beheading the Blacksmith of Balkh: Iranian Americans scapegoated again”.

Most recently, again, horrid and despicable crimes against humanity took place in Paris followed by another in San Bernardino, California. These mass murders were committed by radicalized individuals under the extremist ideology of Wahhabism that belongs to the Saudi Arabian state religion. As result, once again we, the Iranian-Americans who have never shared such ideology nor practiced such abhorrent uncivilized acts, are being punished. One more time we are being made the scapegoat for the legislative body in our new homeland. There is an interesting parallel between the story of the “Beheading the Blacksmith of Balkh” and our situation and we should be aware of the facts.

This is a Persian story about “a ruler who heard a blacksmith had committed a crime in the city of Balkh, now in northern Afghanistan. In his desire to appear swift in meting out justice he ordered the arrest and beheading of the culprit. But, as Balkh was too far away, the ruler decreed that beheading any blacksmith would do. And yet his henchmen were unable to find such an artisan in nearby towns. All they found was a coppersmith in the city of Shushtar in western Iran. So, our zealous ruler called for the execution of the poor coppersmith of Shushtar lest the crime of the blacksmith of Balkh went unpunished.”

The United States House of Representatives recently reenacted the blacksmith story when they hastily pushed through H.R. 158, the so called “Visa Waiver Program Improvement Act of 2015. This act was followed and the bill was passed by the Senate and signed by the President, now officially it is the law. This bill implements travel restrictions for individuals determined to be a U.S. security threat, among others, dual nationals from Iraq, Sudan, Syria, and Iran. But if this bill is targeted to those who have committed terrorist activities against the U.S., we must ask why Saudi and Pakistani dual nationals are not included? Simple. “Somebody had to be nailed” and “nobody ever pays a political price for targeting Iranian Americans”!

We take pride in being the very best of the immigrant groups in this nation. More than 80% of our population is well educated with prominent jobs, and we indeed do help the economy of our new homeland tremendously. Yet, as the result of a horrendous revolution we collectively experienced, even after nearly four decades and two new generations of children in America, we often chose to be silent. The result is the backlash we are getting in such acts as the H.R. 158 situation. The awakening to reality is often too late and too harmful to us and the future of our children for whom we had thought we have brought to a safe haven.

Time and again, I have emphasized the need for our community to have legislative representations. We have to come out of individualism and become that successful immigrant group that we are - together. Hopefully, this new legislative act will help us see clearly how important it is for our survival to be united. We must have voices that can be heard. Keep in mind that politics is horse trading and therefore, there is no quarantine, on bigotry and prejudices.
PCC November and December Events:

**Jong e Farhanghi (Cultural Variety Show), takes place on the second Friday of the month at the Iranian-American Center.**

The November 13, show was hosted by Ali Sadr. The first part of the program consisted of a short film about street children in Tehran and the upcoming fundraising to sponsor 200 of these children. The second part was an interview with Mansour Abedinejad about Mess Negari or Copper Graphic where he exhibited four art pieces at the Center. After the intermission the program continued with an interview with Nooredin Zarrinkelk (Father of Animation in Iran). Three short films were shown and analyzed.

The December 11, show was hosted by Saied Nouri Boushehri and Nooshin Khorsandan. The first part of the program was an interview with Ferdows Maleki, (Artist and Designer) about her abstract art and the art that were exhibited at the Center. The program continued with an interview with Mehrnoosh Mazarei, (a local writer) about her new novel, “Mina’s Revolution.” The second part of the program was hosted by Anahita Babaei and consisted of a story reading by four local writers, Noushin Khorsandan, Saeid Noori Boushehri, Noushin Vahidi, and Azita Mamaghani.
The County of San Diego & Employee Resource Groups

The County of San Diego & Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) held their annual holiday celebration December 12th at the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar for dinner, dancing, live entertainment and other festivities. The ERGs (African American Association of County Employees, the Asian Pacific Alliance of County Employees, County of San Diego Filipino-American Employees Association, Emerging Workforce Association (Millennials), LGBT & Allies Association, San Diego County Middle Eastern Employee Resource Group, San Diego County Latino Association, and VALOR (Veterans)) have a combined membership of over 1,000 members. County of San Diego Supervisor Greg Cox (District 1) and the County’s Chief Administrative Officer Helen Robbins-Meyer addressed the more than 220 attendees, including representatives from the other County Board Supervisors’ offices, the Registrar of Voters Michael Vu, the County Treasurer, Tax Collector Dan McAllister and many others in the highest levels of management at the County. Guests were treated to 4 cultural performances reflecting the culture and diversity of San Diego County and its employees. The Persian Dance Academy of the Persian Cultural Center performed two lovely dances. Dancers Kimia Jalali, Anahita Emami, Attosa Emami, Nikita Bordbar, Helia Karimi Farjood, and Shakiba Mahmoudi did a wonderful job and truly represented the Persian community beautifully. There were 3 additional performances: African American dance, Hawaiian dance, and Salsa dance performances.

Sara Agahi

Film and Discussion Group meets on the first Sunday of the month at the Iranian-American Center.

On October 30, 2015 the film committee organized its first sold out, “Filmoween” (Halloween party) at the center. The evening consisted of fun, games, and food.

On December 11, the movie, “Under the Skin of City” by Rakhshian Bani, was shown. Prior to discussion, a short movie by Azadeh Ghochagh called “Sormeh” was shown. Followed by a question and answer session by the director and the photographer.

Zemestan (winter) Concert - On Saturday November 5, PCC hosted another sold out concert with Kourosh Taghavi and three other local artists as the Hamazvan Ensemble at the Center. The audience enjoyed a memorable night of Persian music. The quality of performance and caliber of music was rare and most enjoyable.

Hamazvan consists of Kourosh Taghavei- Setar, Milad Jahadi- Daf & Tonbak, Nilofar Shirì – Kamancheh and Vocal, Hesam Abedini - Vocal and Dayereh.

Yalda Celebration on December 19th PCC hosted the annual Yalda celebration at Sufi Restaurant with DJ and Roya Saba performance.

PCC Dance Academy students performed at the House of Iran Fall festival and the County of San Diego Holiday gathering.
I was recently in Iran for our annual trip to see family. We are usually so inundated with cramming in visits and going here and there that I don’t know if I’m coming or going. This trip was different. We went with no plans, and did not go and see anyone who wasn’t capable of coming to see us for a short visit.

The week prior to our flight, my daughter and I attended a “Universal Children’s Day” ceremony at the Iranian School of San Diego, where my daughter attends Farsi and Persian Dance classes. As I am so involved in social work within my career, I was not tuned in to the presentation about the Iranian children in need. After all, I provide therapy to children in need here in California. I do my part. I assist women and children in shelters and all the trauma and abuse that goes along with it. I work with our homeless population, which includes children. Besides, what do the children in Iran have to do with me? I’m not Iranian.

The principal, Mr. Ali Sadr, talked about “Project 200 – Left Behind Child” and “Society for Protecting the Rights of the Child.” To be honest, I was kind of scratching my head wondering why he was so insistent on talking to the kids about this—after all, they were all drooling over the pizza that had just been delivered and didn’t seem to be paying attention. Nor were the parents. It was at that time that I began to get irritated. It felt as though I was surrounded by a bunch of entitled, spoiled kids (and adults) who did not appreciate all they have, including my own kid. It was also at this time that Mr. Sadr began to talk about a place called Nasser Khosrow near the Bazar-e Tehran. He spoke of the street kids and children who work as porters in the Bazar, who work all day peddling their wares just to make ends meet for their families, if they even have a family. Instead of going to school, these little kids work all day. Then it hit me. I KNOW these kids. I see them when I go to the Bazar every year. These are the kids that break my heart every time I’m in Iran at the Bazar, in the subway, and on the streets.

Now, it’s one thing to help kids here, but the American kids I work with and help all go to school. Most have parents, and none work. None. Thanks to our social services, they—for the most part—have at least one meal a day at home, and are fed through the school lunch program.

You know where this story is going, right? As I stood there hearing about the street kids, in the same Bazar that I would be shopping in the following week, I knew I could not go without paying a visit to this Nasser Khosrow center. I had to see this place and determine if these kids were actually in extreme need of help. After all, I’m careful about the organizations to whom I donate. I want to make sure that the money truly goes where it is supposed to go and is helping those it is intended to help. I was going to be in the neighborhood, why not?

When we arrived in Iran, my sister-in-law, knowing all too well that I can’t sit still, asked what I had on my list of things to do for this trip. When I told her that I wanted to visit a couple places for children in need called Nasser Khosrow and Shoush, she looked at me as though I was crazy. Since she and I are typically a dynamic duo, with a tag-a-long kiddo, right away she probably knew this would be work for her. I gave her a number to call and asked her to set up an appointment to see these organizations with a woman by the name of Mrs. Mashayekh. (Little did I know Mrs. Mashayekh spoke perfect English - I was too nervous to call her for fear that I would fumble in my very broken Farsi). We set a date and Mrs. Mashayekh insisted on picking us up and taking us herself. I, my sister-in-law, and my seven-year-old daughter went to visit not one, not two, but three incredible organizations that assist children. Mrs. Mashayekh told me that she taught Chemistry (in English). I believe her. She seems brilliant. What didn’t add up was when had she had time to teach? She seemed to be a celebrity in her own right. It was like walking around with Mother Teresa.

Having traveled a lot and having seen a lot of poverty in my travels, particularly in India, I did not expect to see anything I hadn’t seen before. We went to Nasser Khosrow first. When we were walking through the narrow alleys to arrive at the center, a favorite quote of mine came to mind. “I am not the same having seen the moon shine on the other side of the world.” — Mary Anne Radmacher I knew, even before we got there, that these kids were going to be different (and yet the same) and that this kind of need is beyond what I had imagined. I was right.

Due to the children’s work schedules, their bosses will only allow them to attend the school for two hours per day, from 7:30 a.m. to
9:30 a.m., Saturday through Wednesday. There are 100 students at the elementary level. They are all children who work in sweatshops or as porters carrying things in the Bazar. The center also serves 200 more children living in the area from poor families who would not be able to send their children to school. The center operates thanks to the tireless efforts of many volunteers—teachers, social workers, you name it. There are five paid volunteers. Their wages? They are paid for their food and transportation to the center on the days they work. That’s it. The rest of the funding entirely goes to the kids. In addition to the academic classroom setting, for one hour per week the children are taught life skills based on the UNICEF model including teaching about sexual assault, self-esteem, and basic day-to-day social skills these children so desperately need. The center also has a football area for the kids to play soccer; sports are used as a method to work on team building and overcoming conflict between the diverse kids. The volunteers send social workers to visit the places of employment to check on the working conditions. The center also distributes school supplies/backpacks for the children and, on different occasions, distributes food and clothing to those in need.

Our next stop: Susa’s House – Shoush. After hailing a cab from the bazar area, we drove through a pretty rough area to Shoush. In a park, directly across from the center, is a homeless drug addict’s haven. There were tents and squatters everywhere. On the other side of the park seemed to be a “regular” school for children. The only thing is, all of the teachers were mullahs. This seemed different than all the other schools and teachers I had seen. The school in Shoush was very similar to the Nasser Khosrow center in what they do, just in a smaller location. They serve 90 children, all of whom work selling items in metro stations. These children’s bosses also limit their school activities due to their work hours. The center offers two shifts. One begins at 11:00am and the other at 3:00pm to accommodate for the children’s work hours. These children have nothing, and yet when we were there, the first thing a very sweet little girl wanted to do is give my daughter one of the bracelets she sells in the Metro station. My daughter has not taken the bracelet off.

Our third and final stop was to an organization called Yaran-e-danesh. This organization assists more than 400 children who are excluded from education because of poverty. These children typically live at home with their parent(s), have high scores academically and the desire to attend school, however, due to their family’s economic situation, are unable to attend school. This organization is far different than the prior two. It is not a school. Instead, those interested in financially assisting a child may sponsor a particular child and pays for the child to attend their local public school. These kids are the ones who are falling through the cracks, but are not eligible for other services. Yaran-e-danesh has highly educated volunteers on staff who screen each child and his or her family to determine needs. Basically, you “adopt”/sponsor a child annually so that the child in need can attend school. All three organizations are amazing and in dire need of your help. I urge all of you to get involved, donate your time, visit these locations if you travel to Iran, and donate money.

Thankfully we have an amazing organization called Dollar – a – Month Fund where if you are able to donate financially to these organizations, it is tax deductible. I urge you to check out each organization’s website for further details:

http://www.dmfund.org/
http://www.yaranedanesh.ir
The following comments are some of the responses that we received regarding HR 158 which is now “law of the land”. I know some of you probably signed petitions, called your representatives and posted much stuff that was generated in opposition to this law. Despite all success and hard work of the Iranian -Americans in this country in the past thirty some years, it shows how venerable we are. We can still be considered “second class citizens”.

Ali Sadr

I never thought I would be a second class citizen when I was in a classroom with my friends, saying the pledge of allegiance. I never thought I would be a second class citizen while I sat around a table with my family, eating Thanksgiving dinner, or watching the fireworks on a warm night in July. I didn’t think that I would ever have to get a visa to go on a school trip, just because I have Iranian parents. I never thought that I, an American, born and raised in California, would face the same discrimination that my parents and grandparents did when trying to enter the country. I now live in Belgium. I’ve gone on music and sports trips to London, Paris, Slovenia, New York, Amsterdam, and Scotland, all with the same privileges as my friends. Now, I have to get a visa to simply go on a class trip? I never thought I would be a second class citizen, in the land of the free. “

- Leela Paymai, 15 years old, ISSD alumni

HR 158 is got nothing to do with Iranians or Iranians being second class citizen. I never felt second class citizen. I did not sign the petition and I think we are making big deal out of this.

-Anonymous

Dear Peyk Community,

We are often told that history is our best teacher. However, a critical examination shows us that this is too simplistic, for history has mostly been told through the eyes of those in power. We must be wary of such “history” and avoid succumbing to its dangerous simplicity. By doing so, we position ourselves to better pursue goods like collective justice, peace, inclusiveness, and acceptance. A “future history” will only possess these goods if systems of power are exposed and rejected. H.R. 158 contains, in its title, clear language that illuminates an agenda toward “terrorist travel prevention”. As a person with dual-national identity (Iranian and American), I am inclined to examine the histories of these two nation-states while holding in mind aforementioned notions of power simultaneously with this very language. This leads me to critical inquiries as to what gets defined as terrorism, and by whom. Is the slaughtering of millions of innocent Afghans and Iraqis since 2002 not considered terrorism? Is British and U.S. colonial and imperialistic activity in Iran since the 1950s not considered a “security threat” to humanity? What about African slavery or the mass extermination of the indigenous population, on which the American legacy stands? When history that is told through the eyes of those in power goes unchecked, people often suffer. Many people groups can attest to this: European Jews in the post WWI era, Japanese in America during the wake of WWII, Black Americans whose institutional oppression and victimization is only now garnering sufficient public attention, and the list goes on. Iranians, as part of the Middle Eastern contingency in America, are now being ushered into their unique place on this list, thanks to H.R. 158 among other things. But we shouldn’t be surprised. After all, “history” tells us that we are part of the “axis of evil”.

- Barbad Salimi

I am not afraid to put my name next to my opinion. I am proud to do so! No American should be treated as a second class citizen. HR-158 undermines the magnificence of our democracy that I love. My wife is a Japanese American and soon after the start of WWII, Japanese Americans were placed in camps, lost everything and had to start over after the war. This was a stain on American history. Yet still, many young Japanese American men volunteered for the all-Japanese American Regiment 442 that suffered 305% casualty rates in Europe and was the most decorated regiment of WWII.

We should never make that mistake again! Iranian Americans are Americans. This is not debatable. Having seen what it is like not to have full freedom, first generation Iranian Americans appreciate American freedom and democratic rights even more than many American citizens who were born here. Thank you for reaching out to me, a “white” American, whose family traces their roots to before the American Revolutionary War...a war fought for many things including freedom of religion and the pursuit of happiness. We should not again have to fight that same war today over these same American values. 

- Robert C. Nelson
I have received messages of “comfort” and “confidence” from loving friends and acquaintances alike following the sad and unsettling San Bernardino shooting assuring me of how happy they are to have me in their community. They are kind and considerate and I cordially thank them. And yet ... and yet what is in the back of my mind is “they are profiling me!” and I get extremely confused because in my mind’s eye my belief system, my identity, my life style and how I conduct myself is so very detached from religious radicalism, gun violence, terrorism ... and the list goes on, that I cannot get past the shock that they might think that I might think that I have anything in common with mass murderers, on any level!

I am law abiding, gentle, peace loving, unassuming and yes ... westernized. I celebrate Nowruz and I celebrate Christmas which is my kid’s favorite holiday ... so I wrap gifts for under our festive tree till my fingers get sore. I celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Chinese New Year, Easter and Nowruz alongside friends and family. I enjoy music and enjoy food from all corners of the world. I recognize my heritage and embrace other cultures and traditions. How is it that all the trees of the world have roots and the tree of my nameless, faceless shame has legs? I flew to the other side of the globe on the wings of hope to build a new life and it ran faster than I flew, can I never outrun its shadow, not even in the land of blue and golden sky?”

Just like many Iranians, I hold dual citizenship with Iran and the United States. I entered the U.S. in 1977 and have lived here ever since. In the summer of 2016, I plan to visit my 80 year-old sister for the last time, knowing that her “time” will soon come. When I think about this trip and eventual re-entry into the U.S. requiring me to obtain a Visa, to navigate an arduous application process, and to endure an ambiguous waiting period, I begin to second guess this plan. I am overcome with nervousness when I think about traveling to my homeland and subjecting myself and my family to this vulnerability. As an Iranian American, I must say that this bill is very upsetting to me. It shows me that, once again, Iranian Americans are being targeted in alarming and unjust ways. This Bill is discriminatory, racist, and un-American.

Regards,

Abdy Salimi

In the past few weeks I have had mixed emotions and conflicting thoughts about HR 158. It is disappointing, but how can I blame the US government, when I, my family, and millions of Iranians have been treated that way and under much harsher conditions by the Iranian government, in their homeland, the country where they were born and raised for the past 36 years. What worries and saddens me, is the direction the humanity is moving toward, and this law is merely a manifestation of a much pervasive threat. We are moving away from unity, tolerance, acceptance and harmony and toward hostility, separation and rejection. We are focusing our most scarce asset, our collective human energy and attention on differences and not commonalities; and on destruction not productivity, and on protecting ourselves against us. The outcome feeds the vicious cycle of fear, terror and hostility. This is what worries me... We are all members of the human race, and residents of this world. Now, you tell me what difference does it make if we are a first, or a second class citizen?

-A H
2016
Iranian American Women Leadership Conference, [San Diego]

San Diego, California- February 28, 2016 – The Iranian-American Women Foundation (IAWF) will host its highly anticipated Women’s Leadership Conference in San Diego to be held at The Westin San Diego Gaslamp District from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

IAW Foundation’s mission is to provide a platform of empowerment and mentorship for Iranian-American women of all ages. Over the last four years, the Foundation has hosted several sold-out leadership conferences for thousands of women in Orange County, Beverly Hills, San Francisco, New York City and Washington D.C. This year’s San Diego conference boasts speakers and guest appearances by some of the most well-respected and inspirational women leaders in the Iranian-American community, such as Nina Ansary, author of Jewels of Allah, and a distinguished panel of five of the first Iranian-American Superior Court judges, including San Diego’s Judge Tamila Ipema. The all-day conference spotlights special moderated panels around diverse topics critical to women’s advancement in today’s 21st century world. The conference also features a “Rising Star Panel” which introduces the younger generation of Iranian-American women professionals who have started inspirational careers, such as Ferial Govashiri, President Obama’s personal secretary.

The vision of the Iranian-American Women’s Leadership Conference is to create a powerful environment of connection, collaboration and inspiration with a highly motivated network of women leaders, who are pioneering new career fields, offering their depth of wisdom to the next generation, and cultivating an all-inclusive community. The IAW Foundation celebrates the unique achievements of Iranian-American women and actively promotes the potential of all women within their communities, while embracing a global vision of excellence.

For further information on ticket sales, sponsorship, exhibits, and scheduled speakers, visit www.iawfoundation.org

Contact: IAWF Office
2182 Dupont Dr. Suite 7
Irvine, CA 92612
Ph: 949-461-1996

VISIT PERSIAN ART GALLERY AT SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART

Note from Marika Sardar, Associate Curator for Southern Asian and Islamic Art at The San Diego Museum of Art

Come find this treasure in the gallery for Persian art: a gorgeous mirror case made in the mid-19th century by one of the Imami group of artists. The front of the shutter and back of the case are decorated with a dense assemblage of flowers inhabited by bees, insects, and birds. The inside of the shutter is painted with an intertwined iris and lily set against a mica-sprinkled ground, with a single butterfly alighting on the iris’ petals. These jewel-like compositions were then further enhanced by the application of a lacquer glaze over the painting, which has given it a deep and lustrous finish.

A group of painters working in the mid- to late-19th century in Isfahan all used the honorific Imami to indicate their descent from Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Whether or not they were a family or a school of unrelated artists is yet to be determined, but a set of signed works provide the names of some 15 members of the group, including Nasrallah Imami, Riza Imami, Muhammad al-Husayni al-Imami, and Javad al-Imami. They specialized in lacquered objects—mirror cases, pen boxes, caskets—and their imagery is generally confined to the traditional themes of birds and flowers.


What’s on now: The museum’s major fall exhibition, titled The Art of Music, opened on September 26 to rave reviews. Spanning many periods of time and cultures of the world, the exhibition focuses on works of art inspired by music and musicians. This includes allegorical representations of musicians from the Renaissance, paintings of divine musicians from India, and portraits of eighteenth century Japanese performers, as well as twenty-first century sound art and abstract paintings of music and musical forms. Open through February 7, 2016.

Also see work by local California artists Harry Sternberg in the exhibition East Coast, West Coast, and In-Between: Harry Sternberg and America, now through May 8, 2016, and James Hubbell, in the exhibition California Wildfire Watercolors, now through February 9, 2016.

Coming soon: The entire museum will be upgraded and reorganized over the next eighteen months. Stop by often to see new galleries as they open throughout the building, starting with the galleries for European art (reopening in February 2016), followed by galleries for Modern art (July 2016) and American art (November 2016), and finishing up with the new spaces for Indian, Southeast Asian, and Persian art in December 2016. In February, you will also be able to see eight new outdoor sculptures displayed in the plaza in front of the museum and joining the other large-scale works in the museum’s sculpture garden.

Feel free to contact me with any questions you have about the museum: msardar@sdmart.org.
Persian Cultural Center  
Tel: (858) 552-9355  Fax & Voice: (619) 374-7335  
www.pccus.org

Iran Burger movie (Directed by M. Jafari Jozani)  
Sat Jan 16th, 2016  
At the Iranian American Center

PCC Annual Community Bazaar at the  
Iranian American Center  
Saturday Jan. 23rd, 2016 From 11am to 3pm

Mahsa & Marjan Vahdat in Concert  
At the Iranian American Center  
Sunday Jan. 24th, 2016 at 6:30PM

Nowruz 1395 (2016) on March 5th, 2016  
Persian Cultural Center  
and Association of Iranian American Professionals  
For more information please contact us at 858-552-9355.

Art Exhibition Open to Public  
From 9:00 am to 3:00 pm (Monday to Friday)  
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121  
Info: 858-552-9355

Movie and Discussion,  
First Sunday of the month at the Center  
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121  
Info: 858-552-9355

Jong-e Farhangi  
Every Second Friday of the month at 7:30 pm  
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121  
Info: 858-552-9355

Setar Class by Kourosh Taghavi  
Registration and info: (858) 717-6389

Tombak Class by Milad Jahadi  
Registration and Info: (858) 735-9634

Daf Workshop  
Sundays 11am-12 at Iranian School of San Diego (ISSD)

Piano Class by Farid Afshari  
Registration and Info: (858) 349-1913

Iranian School of San Diego  
858-552-9355

Nowruz preparation and Nowruz Bazaar  
Sunday, March 6, 2016  
Mt Carmel High School, 10am-12pm

Nowruz Celebration  
Sunday, March 13, 2016, 4:30-7:30pm

Branch I  
Sundays from 9:30am-1pm  
Mt. Carmel High School

Branch II  
Thursdays from 6-8pm  
Mt. Carmel High School  
Mount Carmel High School  
9550 Carmel Mountain Road • San Diego, CA 92129

Persian Dance Academy of San Diego  
(858) 552-9355  www.pccus.org

Dollar a Month Fund  
Tel: 858-552-9355 • www.dmfund.org  
www.facebook.com/DollarAMonthFund

Association of Iranian-American Professionals (AIAP)  
Tel: (858) 207-6232 • www.aiap.org  
Last Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM  
at Sufi Mediterranean Cuisine  
5915 Balboa Ave, San Diego, CA 92111

ISTA (Iranian Student Association at UC San Diego)  
www.istaucsd.org

House of Iran  
Tel: (619) 232 Iran  Balboa Park,  
Sundays 12:00-4:00pm

Iranian-American Scholarship Fund  
Tel: (858) 552-9355  
www.iasfund.org  
www.facebook.com/Iranian-AmericanScholarshipFund

Mehrgan Foundation  
www.Mehrganfoundation.org • Tel (858) 673-7000

PAAIA  
Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian-Americans  
www.paaia.org

NIAC  
National Iranian-American Council  
www.niac.org

Book Club Meeting  
First Sunday of the month at the Center  
Iranian-American Center • 6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121  
Info: 858-552-9355

Iranian-American Life Science Network (IALSN)  
www.ialsn.org

for latest Events in San Diego visit:  
www.chekhabar.com

The Opening Night: Ed Ruscha Then & Now  
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego - La Jolla  
January 29, 2016 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM  
700 Prospect St, La Jolla, CA 920, 858.454.3541  
Contact: info@mcasd.org

Wellington International Ukulele Orchestra  
California Center for the Arts, Escondido  
February 2, 2016 Time: 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM  
340 N Escondido Blvd, Escondido, CA 92025, 800.988.4253  
Contact: info@artcenter.org

Family ArtLAB: Art Texting  
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego - La Jolla  
February 17, 2016 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM  
700 Prospect St, La Jolla, CA 920, 858.454.3541  
info@mcasd.org

Nowruz preparation and Nowruz Bazaar  
Sunday, March 6, 2016  
Mt Carmel High School

Nowruz Celebration  
Sunday, March 13, 2016, 4:30-7:30pm

Branch I  
Sundays from 9:30am-1pm  
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Branch II  
Thursdays from 6-8pm  
Mt. Carmel High School  
Mount Carmel High School  
9550 Carmel Mountain Road • San Diego, CA 92129

Persian Dance Academy of San Diego  
(858) 552-9355  www.pccus.org

Visit Our website at www.pccus.org

Visit Persian Art Gallery  
at the san Diego Museum of Art

NEW
Surprise birthday parties for my parents’ friends became a trend in my Iranian community when I was in middle school. Birthday celebrations, once observed in the privacy of one’s home, were now displayed for the public eye so everyone could enjoy your birthday, cultural customs aside. The first and last adult surprise birthday party I attended was for my mother at a well-known, reservation-only type of restaurant—a newfound Iranian hot-spot.

One Saturday afternoon, my mother’s close friend called her in a panic, asking her to meet her at the restaurant for lunch and some dard-e-del-ing. Handheld cellphones were not yet invented so my mother was speaking to her friend on our car phone, which was about the size of a teekeye noone barabri. Politely eavesdropping, I could hear the panicked voice on the other end. I could not make out the words, but I recognized my mother’s tone and that deep, fixated look setting in her eyes. I knew our plans were changing and I knew there was no turning back. I was getting dragged along wherever my mother needed to go.

As we opened the door to the waiting area of the restaurant, tavalod mobarak! tavalod mobarak! was echoing through the entrance of the restaurant. Twenty of my mother’s closest friends were on the other side, waiting to host her a surprise birthday lunch. Greeting a group of Iranian women is always a bit overwhelming and confusing; everyone smells of the same perfume and everyone has the same shade of dyed hair. Saying hello to my mother’s friends can often feel the same as navigating iMaps when I’m lost—I never really understand what the GPS is saying, but I always have faith the GPS will get me to my destination.

Cheeks pinched and eyesight going blurry, I made it to end of the line and took a deep breath. This was just the beginning, too. My mom’s party led her to the table, weaving erratically through the other tables and unabashedly giving the term “personal boundaries” a new meaning as they bumped shoulders with other seated guests. Loud laughter, random clapping sounds and soot-soot, daast-daast were only some of the sounds I remember hearing as they paraded my mother to her birthday throne, a seat at the table in the middle of the restaurant. Politely navigating questions about school and comments about what a great doctor I would become because so-and-so is so happy and don’t you want to be happy, we made it through the meal. I glanced at my mother, eyes asking when we would leave, and she gave me a long eye blink, code for “soon.” (Soon = you need to make it through two rounds of tea and two rounds of goodbyes. And a final goodbye at the car. Unless you’re invited for tea at someone’s house. Then it’s an be-omid-e-who-knows situation).

I gave a long blink back, meaning I understood, and tried to make myself comfortable. As the table cleared and tea was served, the leader of the Iranian group screamed surprise! I baked you a cake! and unveiled a 12x12 homemade cake, sealed in a grocery bag, from under the table. Shrieks of laughter and many vaaadys later, a very loud chorus of tavalod mobarak began in the restaurant. I tried to slide under the table, hide under my chair, run to the bathroom (previous experiences of hiding in the bathroom never failed), but I was stuck. I endured the looks, the polite claps, and happy birthdays from neighboring tables, but this experience paralleled my Girl Scout Cultural Swap Day. At that point, I was thankful no one had the urge to dance around the table and perform a knife dance for my mother. I couldn’t believe my mother’s friend brought a cake—and her own knife—to the restaurant.

Cutting pieces of cake and saving one for each of the restaurant staff, we sat a little longer and I tried to make myself invisible by memorizing the marble floor pattern and the creative ways I could tie my shoelaces. It was not until we left the restaurant and I felt the cold air against my cheeks that I felt simultaneously revived and exhausted. As I opened the passenger seat door, ready to go home, I heard lotfan befarmain khoooneye ma vase chai.

Marriam is a young professional exploring her dual identity through narrative and written prose, often writing about her personal experiences as a second-generation Iranian growing up in Kansas City. Her mother’s surprise birthday party was inspired by a number of surprise, and not-so-surprise, birthday parties.
Revisiting Septembers of Shiraz

By Shaghayegh Hanson

In the past issues of Peyk I reviewed Dalia Sofer’s excellent book, Septembers of Shiraz. All these years later the book has been made into a movie that just premiered on September 15, 2015 at the Toronto Film Festival and was the opening night feature at the San Diego Film Festival on September 30, 2015. As of this writing, I have yet to see it out on general release at the box-office. But that’s okay because I’m not sure I would even go to see it.

It’s always a risk going to see a movie of a great book you’ve read, right? Oftentimes, the book is so much better, and sometimes the movie even ruins the pleasant memories you had of the book. Rarely do you leave the movie theater with the satisfying feeling that the filmmaker got it “just right.” However, it seems that this movie of Septembers of Shiraz got it all wrong.

First of all, what’s with casting Salma Hayek and Adrien Brody for the main roles? There are plenty of good Iranian actors out there to choose from. I watched the trailer and was in pain listening to Hayek’s accent…real pain. In fact, a review of the movie in The Guardian made reference to this as Hayek’s “‘where in the world is this?’ accent.” The review went on to demolish the movie entirely by describing it like this: “This lifeless, by-the-numbers production is an excruciating exercise in cliche and tedium. Its sole joy is in trying to figure out which of its leads is overacting most.” Ouch. Variety’s review, equally damning, noted that despite Dalia Sofer’s (the author’s) resistance to selling to “Hollywood” the movie “now feels like a simplistic, somewhat pandering melodrama that will please armchair Islamophobes.” Double ouch.

I must say, I’m disappointed the movie is getting such terrible reviews because the book is, as I said, excellent. Whether you see the movie or not, you definitely should consider reading the book. I am reprinting my review with the hope that it will whet your appetite!
Fatty Liver
"Jeegareto-bokhoram!"

This daily expression we Iranians often use to express our deep feelings for our loved ones is one of those humorous statements that really doesn’t translate well into the English language – “I will eat your liver.”

But we Iranians are onto something here. The liver is quite a vital organ. To name a few special characteristics, it filters the nutrients that leave the gastrointestinal tract before sending it out to the rest of the body, detoxifies chemicals and potentially harmful substances, metabolizes drugs, and produces clotting factors to aid in the cessation of bleeding. Needless to say, as Iranians have discovered, we cannot live without our “jeegar” (or loved ones).

With that being said, there’s not a day that goes by in clinic that I don’t encounter an abnormal liver blood test – it’s that common. And likely you yourself or a close family member have been told that your liver tests are abnormal. If so, you’re not alone.

The overwhelming majority of patients have elevated liver “enzymes” due to something called “fatty liver.” Studies show that up to 46% of the U.S. population suffers from this liver condition and, unfortunately, it continues to further rise as our obesity epidemic increases. It is by far the most common liver condition in both men and women.

What Is Fatty Liver?

It can sound rather intimidating to hear your doctor tell you that your liver is “full of fat”—is that indeed what they are saying?

Well, the term is really a reflection of the pathology of the liver cells when viewed under the microscope. Liver biopsies taken from patients diagnosed with fatty liver often reveal fat droplets within the liver cells. It is not a reflection of how overweight a person is. Although patients who are overweight have a higher risk of fatty liver, not all patients with fatty liver are overweight; and not all overweight patients have fatty liver.

Who gets fatty liver? Those with the following risk factors are more prone towards this condition:

- Diabetes Type II
- Elevated Cholesterol
- Hypertension
- Metabolic syndrome
- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)
- Hypothyroidism
- Sleep Apnea
- Obesity
- Medication side effects: such as amiodarone, tamoxifen, steroids, and estrogen

Note that alcohol can also produce a similar liver pathology. However, if your liver is affected by alcohol, it excludes the diagnoses of fatty liver as the cause, for obvious reasons.

Unfortunately, most patients with fatty liver are often unaware of it, because patients do not typically display symptoms.

Diagnosis of Fatty Liver

Because there are no symptoms, it’s often discovered by the doctor after running a routine blood test, often during a physical exam. As the first step, elevated liver enzymes, typically AST (aspartate aminotransferase) and/or ALT (alanine aminotransferase) are found incidentally.

Then, as part of the detective work in pursuit of the etiology for these elevations, in addition to ordering further blood work to exclude other causes, your doctor may also order an ultrasound. Fatty liver is often diagnosed on a liver ultrasound. CT scans can also incidentally show fatty liver, but ultrasounds are better at visualizing the liver and without the need for any potentially harmful radiation exposure.

There are two categories of fatty liver—a mild and reversible process (called Nondalcoholic Fatty Liver, or NAFL) and a more advanced disease with inflammation and potential scarring of the liver (termed Nondalcoholic Steatohepatitis, or NASH). In order to further determine the severity of the damage caused by these fatty droplets in patients deemed higher risk, a liver biopsy may be performed, but this is rare. Most patients do not require a liver biopsy. Most cases of fatty liver are the benign and reversible type, but occasionally can inflame the liver, cause enlargement (termed “hepatomegaly”), and even cirrhosis.

Treatment of Fatty Liver

Therefore, the best way to treat fatty liver is to reverse it and prevent its recurrence. If you can catch fatty liver before it progresses, you can prevent further damage. Here are some tips on how to attack it:

1. Weight Loss: This is the most important treatment goal in those with fatty liver, as weight loss has been shown to reverse the fatty infiltration of the liver. This is yet another good reason to get into shape.
2. If you are a diabetic, get your blood sugars under tight control.
3. If you have high cholesterol, lower it.
4. Avoid all alcohol.
5. Supplement with omega-3-fatty acids: some studies show a possible benefit in some patients with fatty liver.

Now, next time you say a jeegar expression, “Jeegareto-bokhoram” or “Jeegaret beram,” to your spouse, children, or loved ones, you not only will be able to express your love, but it can be a reminder to take good care of your jeegar (and yourselves) in more ways than one!

Dr. Sanaz Majd is a board-certified family medicine physician who podcasts and blogs at http://housecalldoctor.quickanddirtytips.com.
Ash e Anar
(Pomegranate Ash with Meatballs):

Makes 10 servings
Start to finish: 2 ½ hrs

Ash:
1 cup rice, ½ cup chopped fresh basil, 2 cups chopped fresh parsley, 2 cups chopped fresh cilantro, ½ cup chopped fresh tarragon, 2½ tsp sea salt, 1 tsp ground black pepper, 1 ¼ cup pomegranate paste, ⅔ cup red kidney beans (washed & drained)

Meatballs:
½ lb. ground lean beef, 1 egg, ¼ cup finely grated onions, ½ cup chopped fresh parsley, ½ cup chopped fresh coriander, ¼ cup chopped fresh tarragon, 1 Tbsp chopped fresh basil, 1 tsp sea salt, ½ tsp turmeric, ½ tsp ground black pepper, ½ cup rice soaked in 1 cup water & 2 tsp salt for 1 hour (then drain and set aside)

Mint & turmeric mixture:
½ cup extra virgin olive oil, 1 ½ Tbsp turmeric, 4 Tbsp dried mint flakes

1. In a large pot (10 quarts), place rice, kidney beans, 2 ½ tsp salt, 1 tsp pepper, and add 12 cups of water. Cover, bring to a boil over medium heat for 1 ½ hours until beans are cooked, stirring occasionally.
2. In a small nonstick frying pan, heat ½ cup oil, add turmeric, stir for 30 seconds, remove from the heat, and add dried mint flakes. Stir well and set aside.
3. Add to the pot the ash ingredients of chopped parsley, basil, tarragon, cilantro and the mint turmeric mixture. Continue cooking for 20 more minutes. Stir occasionally.
4. In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients for meatballs. Mix thoroughly and shape into meatballs the size of a medium tangerine, and add one by one to the pot. Cover and cook over low heat for 35 minutes.
5. Pour pomegranate paste into the pot, simmer over low heat for another 30 minutes, and stir occasionally.
6. Check the seasoning, ladle the ash into a tureen or individual bowls, and serve warm.
3- Facts about cholesterol

By Mohammad Ahrar, PhD

Introduction

Summary of previous articles; In Peyk magazine # 159, the role saturated and unsaturated fatty acids in our diet was reviewed. General information about Omega-3 and Omega 6 fatty acids were discussed in the Peyk # 160. In this article we will reveal some facts about cholesterol.

The basics:

Cholesterol is classified as a lipid which is biosynthesized by all animal cells. Foods from animal sources contain cholesterol. Unlike other fats, such as triglycerides and oils that are involved in energy production in the body, cholesterol does not serve as a source of energy. Cholesterol is not water soluble, or is slightly soluble due to the presence of only one hydroxyl group (OH) on its chemical structure. For this reason it is also referred to as sterol, the same category as steroid hormones such as estrogen, and is precursor of steroid hormones. The chemical structure of cholesterol is also different from other lipids; the carbon chains in cholesterol form four rings with some attached molecules. Figure below shows a typical cholesterol formula and two of its derivative hormones (estrogen and testosterone).

Importance of Cholesterol:

1- Cholesterol is an integral part of the cell membrane in all tissues of the body. About 20% of the lipids in the cell membrane is in form of cholesterol, which is essential for the structure and functions of the cells.
2- The myelin sheath surrounding the axon of most neurons (nerve cells), which helps with rapid nerve impulse, is rich in cholesterol. Degradation of myelin sheath, can cause multiple sclerosis (MS).
3- Cholesterol is a major component of bile, which is formed in the liver and stored in gallbladder. Bile acids solubilize (emulsify) fats in the digestive tract and aid in the absorption of fats and fat-soluble vitamins, such as vitamin A, D, E, and K.
4- Cholesterol is synthesized by all cells of the body, particularly by liver cells, and serves as a precursor of several hormones, including, estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. It is also a precursor molecule for the synthesis of vitamin D.
5- Cholesterol contributes to the embryonic development, and proper function of central nervous system. Human breast milk contains significant quantities of cholesterol. The brain contains more cholesterol than any other organ in the body.

Absorption of dietary cholesterol:

When we eat food, especially fatty food, considerable amount of bile is released from gall bladder into the small intestine. Most of the cholesterol in bile is absorbed by the small intestine, and some leaves the digestive system. Medical research has shown that the dietary cholesterol is poorly absorbed compared to the cholesterol from the bile (4). Other researches reveal that, when blood cholesterol rise after each fatty meal, the body produces less cholesterol as a negative feedback. For these reasons, cholesterol intake from food has little, if any, effect on total body cholesterol or concentrations of cholesterol in the blood.

What is good cholesterol and what is bad cholesterol?

In scientific term, there is not such a thing as bad or good cholesterol. Cholesterol is a unique chemical compound, and is essential for the proper functions of all cells in the body. However some people may associate cholesterol with unhealthy compound, and try to eliminate it from the diet. The negative image of cholesterol is attributed to the belief that cholesterol is association with heart diseases. As discussed below, that is not always the case. The fact is that cholesterol, like other lipids, is not soluble in water, therefore, when fats and cholesterol are transported in blood plasma, they must combine with more soluble compounds such as proteins. When proteins are combined with lipids, they form lipoproteins. These molecules transport cholesterol and other lipids in blood stream. Depending on the proportion of proteins and different lipids in lipoproteins, they are classified into four classes, among them are Very Low-Density Lipoprotein (VLDL), Low-Density Lipoprotein (LDL), and High-Density Lipoprotein (HDL). Therefor HDL and LDL aren’t actually cholesterol, but they are lipoproteins that contain cholesterol.

Functions of HDL: This lipoprotein contain about 50% protein and about 20% cholesterol, plus other fats. The role of this type of lipoprotein is to pick up extra cholesterol from body cells and the blood vessels, and carry them to the liver for elimination via the bile, or production od other compounds. The HDL also carry the cholesterol to adrenal glands, testes and ovaries for synthesis of steroid hormones. Since HDLs prevent accumulation of cholesterol in the blood, and is associated with decreased risk of coronary artery disease, the HDL-cholesterol is known as ‘good’ cholesterol.

Functions of LDL: this lipoprotein has more cholesterol and triglycerides and less protein. In liver cells (hepatocytes),
the dietary fatty acids and triglyceride form very low density Lipoproteins (VLDL) and other types of LDLs which are the major carriers of cholesterol in the blood. LDLs carry cholesterol and other fats from liver to the cells via the blood stream. Because small dense LDLs can enter the lining of the inflamed arteries, and contribute to formation of plaques (atherosclerosis) which can causes heart attacks and strokes, the LDL-cholesterol, is known as “bad’ cholesterol.

Why LDLs are associated with cardio vascular disease;

The fact is that the lipoproteins are spherical particles and carry triglycerides and most of cholesterol inside the particle, and carry proteins and phospholipids on the exterior of the spherical particles. The interesting point is that in addition to the carrier tasks of lipoproteins, there are special small protein molecules called apoproteins or apolipoprotein (Apo for short) on the surface of the spherical lipoprotein particles; you may think of a Ping-Pong ball with lots of cholesterol inside, and many pins sticking out of the ball (representing the apoproteins). On the other hand, the cell membrane of body cells including liver cells, contain different proteins that functions as receptors and can only recognize specific apoproteins. The apoproteins and the receptors work like a key that fits into a specific lock. When the key (apoproteins) on LDL particles find the proper lock (the receptors) on the cell membrane, as if a gate opens and lipoprotein containing cholesterol enters the cells. Only specific apoproteins (Apo B-100) are recognized by LDL receptors (3). When the cells accumulate lot of cholesterol, the production of LDL receptors on the cell membrane is blocked, so new LDL-cholesterol cannot be taken up by the cells, and many LDL molecules appear in the blood.

Here is the problem; some studies (6) show that the small LDLs in blood can be oxidized and be taken up by macrophages (a type of white blood cells), that become engorged like a foamy cell. These foamy cells are often trapped in the walls of inflamed arteries and contribute to atherosclerosis (formation of plaque in arteries). When the plaques block small arteries in the heart (coronary arteries) they cause heart attacks. If the plaques block small arteries in the brain they cause stroke.

New findings about LDL reveal that there are different subtypes of LDL; large LDL particles and small dense LDL particles. The small, dense lipoproteins (sdLDL), but not the large LDLs, can penetrate the arterial wall easily, and causes arterial diseases. The sdLDLs are also much more susceptible to oxidation, which is another crucial step in the heart disease process. So we can consider small-dense LDLs as problematic, but it does not apply to large LDLs.

If we do not eat any animal product how is cholesterol produced?

Because cholesterol is an essential compound for the physiology of all cell, it is produced by all cells of the body form the nutrients such as oils, proteins, and carbohydrates, including fruits and vegetables. Here is how it works; The 30 carbons of the cholesterol originate from a 2-carbon molecule called acetic acid or acetate, which is produced from metabolism of carbohydrates, lipids and proteins during normal cellular metabolism. The acetate binds with a coenzyme called coenzyme A (CoA for short), and produce acetyl CoA. This product can be used either to produce energy in the mitochondria of our cells, or the two carbons in acetyl CoA bind to other carbons in series of reactions, to make fatty acids, cholesterol or other products. In other words, acetyl CoA is an intermediate molecule during metabolism of simple sugars, complex carbohydrates, fats and even proteins that we normally eat. High fat diets produce more acate compared to carbohydrates, so they produce more cholesterol. Most of the cholesterol is produced in the liver. Cholesterol is also synthesized by other cells, especially cells of the adrenal glands, ovaries, and testes for production of hormones.

Why some people have high blood cholesterol and some don’t?

The fact is that the production of receptors for LDL on some cells including liver cells is genetically controlled (3). People who have the genes that codes for synthesis of these special receptors, allow cholesterol to enter the hepatocytes, metabolized and eliminated via bile. Therefore, these people have less cholesterol in blood, even if they consume more high cholesterol diets. On the other hand, some people may have a different gene, or a mutated gene that does not code for production of receptors on liver cells. Therefore, LDL cannot be taken in by hepatic cells as much, therefore, the cholesterol level in blood of these individuals stays higher, regardless of their low-fat diet.

Factors that affect blood cholesterol level

Some factors such as high fiber diets, flavonoids in red grape and red wine, Omega3 fatty acids, soy protein, vitamin E, and exercise contribute to low LDL-cholesterol level in blood. Some other factors such as old age, menopause, dietary trans fats, palmitic acid (found in palm oil and some animal products), cigarette smoking, and diabetes tend to increase LDLs.