Peyk 25th Anniversary
Since 1991

- Travel, Enjoy Life and Learn
- What does it mean to be an Iranian-American?
- Not Without My Daughter
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By the time you receive this issue, we will have elected a new President. Some of us will be happy and some ready to slam the rest with imaginable and unimaginable slanders. As far as I’m concerned, I’m giving my brain a rest from all the rhetoric that we have been subjected to for nearly two crazy years in the political arena of our nation. Of course, to date as I write this piece we are still on the roller coaster of “who knows what will happen.” Que sera sera - whatever will be, will be! All I can say is, may the creator have mercy on us.

I have always believed that we live in an exciting and amazing world, full of culture, as well as heritages so different than our own, however, well worth learning from. I don’t travel to soak in the sun for I live in one of the most beautiful climates for such leisure life. Every year, we try to visit a new place in the world and learn more about it’s culture and the people. Each trip brings to our lives better understanding and new friends. We come back with great energy and enjoy sharing our story with family and friends. At times, language and some cuisine can put us out of our comfort zone, but in general people everywhere are very congenial and happy to help, they are always curious to learn about us as well. As far as food goes, we all can survive on healthy and natural ingredients used far more than we do.

Of course, before leaving we were asked why are we travelling to Europe when everything is in such disarray of “what if”? At my age, the possibility of having a heart attack in the early hours of morning is greater than worrying about should I travel or not? Life is too short and I still have so many places to see, so many people to meet and so much more to learn and enjoy. Through my travels I learn the history of each nation we visit, each gives me a stronger background and affirms my own work for our community. This year it was Prague (Praha), Czech Republic and Leiden, in the Netherlands where we had a family reunion with four generation of cousins that I grew up with. They all came from different parts of the world. We shared memories, we laughed and greatly appreciated the opportunity of having few days together. “La Familia” is the word that rejuvenates me, they brought with them, as we did, unconditional love and so many wonderful memories.

Since I was sixteen I have travelled to the Netherlands many times and have enjoyed immensely the people and the places we have visited. It is one of the smaller nations within Europe. Everyone speaks at least four languages, including English. Amsterdam, the capital is home to one of the finest museums-Rijks. Keep in mind many great masters of art such as Rembrandt, Vermeer, Van Gogh, Steen, Hals and the list goes on and on, were all born in Netherlands. Annually, the flower fields produce millions of tulips for export. Canals throughout the street of cities are one way of transportation and very impressive how they connect everything via waterways. Transportation for millions is with bicycles and they always have the right of way. We arrived there in time to see young and old, male and female wearing the pink ribbon that is the symbol of supporting breast cancer during the month of October. This really amazed me that how seriously they believed in supporting the cause. As a survivor, I was so deeply touched and grateful for such a thoughtful gesture. I learned the pink ribbon for breast cancer is an international symbol. Saw the same support in the Frankfurt airport as well. Cheers to all human beings who have strong beliefs and support it.

For years I had wanted to visit Prague (Praha) and thanks to my thoughtful daughter it happened. What a beautiful city and so much history behind it. The town is divided into the old and new sections with a river separating the two. Mostly all cobbled streets and roads, for certain one should definitely have comfortable shoes to walk there. The architecture of so many buildings has been beautifully preserved and the re-building of the nation has been amazing after the departure of the Nazi occupation. I don’t remember seeing any buses (except mini buses for such as “Hop On Hop Off”). City transportation is handled via double cable cars and as a result there is a much better air quality. Some of the most beautiful and finest crystal products are from the Czech Republic, and some of the best natural mineral water spas are also here. We visited the city of Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) where both of these unique specialties are offered. It will amaze you to see the flow of the mineral water in the form of fountains in the air and people with a cup in hand freely drinking from the water.

The world is not just about boutiques and shopping centers but more about human connections, the cultural backgrounds and the ability to learn and appreciate with respect for one another. We have incredible parks, monuments, museums, and truly wonders of the world to see right here all around us in our country, as well as the world. By travelling and enjoying life, we will always add to our knowledge, and as the saying goes “knowledge is power.”

All of this said, it is always good to be back home in San Diego.
The Persian Cultural Center’s board of directors holds its board meeting every second Wednesday of the month. The last two meetings took place on September 14 and October 12, 2016.

**Jong Report**

*Jong Farhangi* has been a monthly program on the Iranian-American Center stage for the last two years. As with any other new program, it took some time for *Jong* to find its own audience and followers, but an audience it absolutely did find. *Jong* is a live variety show with emphasis on art and culture. The program guests use *Jong*'s podium to share their views on a variety of art and cultural subjects with an eager audience. The program does not fail to pique the followers’ interests and the speakers’ enthusiasm.

**San Diego Jong Farhangi- September 9, 2016**

The September *Jong*, hosted by Ali Sadr, was presented in three parts. The first guest, journalist and political commentator Reza Goharzad, talked about “Truth or Neutrality,” Christiane Amanpour’s reference to the media’s responsibility during post-Brexit discussions that blew a new wind into the media’s sails. The next guest, music composer and conductor Hanibal Joseph, who has recently taken residence in Southern California, talked about the formation of an Iranian philharmonic orchestra, his visions, its challenges, and future programs. The last guest, Farhad Bahrami, longtime San Diego musician and the leader of the band *Dornob*, talked about his goals and visions and his efforts to build community bridges through artistic creativity and fusion music in particular.

**San Diego Jong Farhangi- October 14, 2016**

The October *Jong*, hosted by Reza Khabazian, was also presented in three parts. The first guest, Ali Ashouri, San Diego and Iranian Community’s literary scholar, talked about notable Persian poet Saadi and modernity. He discussed Saadi’s avant-garde stance on social issues, politics, the economy, and linguistics, and argued that Saadi’s lexicon is the foundation of today’s Persian etymology. Speaker Sasan Nakshab, of San Diego’s Nakshab Development and Design, talked about his roots in Khorasan, Iran, his move to the U.S. at a young age, his interest and business in architecture and construction, and his enduring interest and hobby—music. Nakshab has followed his vision with active production and has a wide music collection that reflects his passion for both Persian poetry and music and Western music alike. The last guest, young Iranian documentary director and producer Sabereh Kashi, spoke about past and current projects, the rewards and challenges of her art and immigration, her personal journey, and the making of her film *Home Yet Far Away*. Kashi noted that the best way to support her art is to follow her activities on social media and recognize her work.
PCC Mehregan October 2, 2016 – Rebirth

PCC celebrates Mehregan every year with a cultural program. Rebirth, a combined art performance based on poems of the last masterpiece of Iranian progressive poet Forough Farrokhzad and contemporary music, took the stage this year at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art. The Australian-Iranian soprano singer Shirin Majd, her ensemble, and contemporary ballet dancer Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam created a program that was rich, fresh, and appealed to both Iranian and non-Iranians through the use of English narration of Iranian poetry, and visual art in the form of Persian calligraphy and beautiful stage lighting. Rebirth was a phoenix arising from Forough’s ashes.

Escondido Roots Series- October 15, 2016

San Diego Children’s Discovery Museum dedicated its October Escondido Roots Series to Iran. PCC collaborated with the museum to celebrate and educate children and families about Iran’s culture. The program consisted of storytelling by children’s author Mina Javaherian, a dance by PCC’s dance group, and music by Delnavazan ensemble. PCC also served a light Persian snack to the participating families.

Six Centuries, Six Years - A documentary screening October 16, 2016

The documentary Six Centuries, Six Years, directed by Mojtaba Mirtahmasb, was shown onscreen at the IAC on Sunday, October 16. The film portrays the endeavors of musician Mohammad Reza Darvishi and a group of Iranian master musicians who locate (mainly in Turkey), restore, and record a repertoire of compositions attributed to Iranian theoretician and musician Abdul Qadir Maraghi. The screening was followed by a Q &A session with the director. It’s notable that Darvishi sent the results of his comprehensive research to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and, in 2014, UNESCO recognized and registered the 600th anniversary of Maraghi as an Iranian musician as part of its historic events and eminent personalities celebration list.
In the previous issue of Peyk, we examined how Persian became one of the Indian subcontinent’s languages of scholarship and belles-lettres between the eleventh and nineteenth centuries. At the peak of its literary career in the seventeenth century, Persian in India afforded hundreds of skilled Iranian and Central Asian scholars, artists, and poets opportunities for patronage, similar to the way Iranians and Afghans come to North America today in pursuit of new horizons. Many scholars vaguely attribute this exodus to an intolerant Safavid state that persecuted those who did not further its Shi’i religious ideology and provided patronage to only a select few who were willing to participate in such a programme. While such an argument may be valid to an extent, there are other factors that contributed to the centrality of Delhi and Agra as the pre-modern centers of Persian literary patronage.

The population of Mughal India was around 100 million, while the Safavids ruled over no more than 10 million people. India boasted of lavish agrarian and human resources while the Safavid empire had far less agricultural capacity. The Safavids also had a foreign trade deficit with India. The economic disparity between the Iranian plateau and the Indian subcontinent compelled Persian-speaking immigrants to move to India in the seventeenth century wherein Persian was already a shared literary and cultural idiom for many religious and ethnic communities. Scholars estimate that India had seven times more people literate in Persian than Iran in the eighteenth century. Simply put, South Asia afforded Persian greater circulatory capacity and transmobility.

If the seventeenth century was the expansion of a Persian literary ecosystem, when and how did it contract? In other words, how did Persian lose its domination and in what forms does its literary and cultural legacy persist today? There is no singular formula that explains Persian’s declining literary career and social space in India. While in recent years the accounts of Persian’s displacement have been revisited, the story of Persian’s “dethronement” in South Asia usually accords to the following narrative (M. Alam’s account paraphrased):

Once the Mughal empire was disaggregated in the nineteenth century, Persian lost its imperial status as the language of political administration and cultural importance. Since it was not widely spoken (as a mother tongue) in India, Persian was, arguably more than anything, associated with Mughal power and prestige. The collapse of the Mughals pulled the plug on Persian’s life in South Asia.

A factor that made the use of Persian attractive and viable in South Asia was the presence of Persian-speaking communities (Iranian and Central Asian) in India as well as diplomatic ties between Safavid and Mughal empires. Persian-speakers were present in South Asia as tutors, poets, artists and secretaries. However, in 1739, following the fall of the Safavid empire, Nader Shah Afshar (d. 1747) brutally attacked Delhi. The sack of Delhi heralded a new era wherein India and Iran began to diverge politically and culturally. The establishment of the Qajar dynasty (1789–1925), the preexisting notion of a territorially-defined Persian literary culture was cemented in tandem with the rise of Iranian nationalism. As a result, new debates emerged between Iranian and Indian scholars regarding linguistic purity and the Iranians’ claim to Persian.

The British, having taken control of nineteenth-century India, initially prized Persian, primarily to familiarize themselves with the inner workings of India’s administrative system and modes of historiography. In 1837, the British pursued a different policy and officially did away with Persian. Indian vernaculars such as Urdu began to gain more grounds at the expense of Persian, a trend that had already begun long before the British gained political control in South Asia. These factors collectively contributed to the displacement of Persian.
to accept that literary history has its own independent, albeit elusive, genealogy.

Twentieth-century critics such as Mohammad-Taqi Bahar (d. 1951) and Zabiullah Safa (d. 1999) actively sought to relate Safavid-Mughal Persian poetry (particularly in later periods) to the precipitous fall of Persian’s political fortunes, which they attributed to British conspiracies and a weak Iranian state incapable of promoting its “national heritage” abroad. Safavid-Mughal poets and critics such as Siraj al-Din Khan Arzu (d. 1756) evaluated their period’s literary production along distinctly different lines that did not include the vague rubric of “decline.” In a sense, Persian may have lost political clout at the official level, but has maintained itself in multiple ways at the societal and cultural levels, an important aspect all but occluded by nationalistic and politicized frameworks that seek to locate Persian’s sudden decline and further attribute it to the collapse of political systems. Overall, the rise and fall of imperial dynasties has served as the main organizational rubric for Persian literary historiography in most (if not all) nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories. We must now return to our central question: in what ways did the Persian literary ecosystem (a metaphor for a literary network or context wherein certain ideas, questions, and behaviors take shape) contract in the nineteenth century?

Persian as a political language is all but gone in twenty-first century South Asia. Persian is no longer actively learned perhaps beyond limited academic and religious circles. But its cultural force persists unabated. It has left its trace in South Asian literature, pop culture, and music. For instance, Urdu has drawn and appropriated its literary genres and models and its poetic lexicon and imagery from Persian. Urdu has also immensely contributed to the development of Persian literary history and criticism. In that sense, the cultural forms created by Persian have not entirely disappeared; they have had a prolific and productive afterlife in many South Asian literary cultures today.

Persian remains, through its ongoing literary afterlife, an estranged yet beloved part of South Asia’s cultural heritage. This is precisely why we must do away with such metaphors as rise and fall in favor of more apt and capacious concepts such as literary career or ecosystem. A literary career begins and ends, but its productivity and legacy persist. Similarly, a literary ecosystem, an interconnected yet self-contained community, consistently waxes and wanes in its environment. Certain species might die which in turn will create broader complications, but the ecosystem eventually adapts and takes on different forms, as is clearly demonstrated by the ongoing afterlife of Persian’s literary career in India.

I am grateful to the intellectual expertise Munis Faruqui, Kevin Schwartz, and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak have devoted to this essay.

Further reading (not previously introduced in *Peyk*):

- *Assembly of Rivals: Delhi, Lucknow, and the Urdu Ghazal* by Carla Petievich (Manohar Publications, 1992)
- *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* by Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (Palgrave, 2001)
- *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab* by Farina Mir (U.C. Press, 2010)
- *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* by Shamsur Rahman Faruqui (Oxford, 2001)

Share your views with Aria: ariafani@berkeley.edu
Assimilation is the gradual process that begins the moment an immigrant sets foot into a country. For some, this process can cause loneliness, isolation, and confusion, especially during times of political unease. On the contrary, for others, assimilation can be graceful as they successfully learn the language, culture, and customs of their new home country. From its foundation in 1776, the United States has been a country of immigrants, embracing immigrants from all walks of life. Moreover, many immigrants who were born in Iran, but moved to the United States as children, are able to have a unique, cross-cultural perspective with supportive communities in both countries that is not accurately represented in reality shows such as the Shahs of Sunset. Here are some real-life stories.

Even since his family left Iran when he was eight years old, Bahram Fathollahi, 49, has found the United States to be a “great nation that openly accepts immigrants of diverse backgrounds and religions. Unlike European nations, it allows immigrants to blend in and maintain their culture while respecting the laws of the land. Conversely, in Europe you have immigrants isolated to their own neighborhoods and told to change their ways and culture and adopt the native customs.” Fathollahi says that the rise of Islamophobia on the European continent is creating a divide between Middle-Easterners and non-Middle-Easterners: “Though there are some small elements of that rising during the national elections here in the United States, it is being constantly challenged.” Despite identifying as more American while he was growing up, after making Iranian friends in college, Fathollahi discovered that he had a passion and thirst for learning more about his birth country: “As one grows older and learns more deeply about the culture and rich traditions, there is a thirst to learn more. I started reading Iranian history and literature, and fell in love with traditional music of the masters. I don’t think this is unique to Iranians but to all immigrants living in the U.S. There is a natural tendency to revert more towards one’s own culture as you grow older.” Now that Fathollahi has more insight into the different aspects of the Iranian culture, he learned that it has positively shaped his identity: “It is exactly the knowledge of my heritage, history, and culture that defines me today and makes it comfortable for me to claim that I am Iranian. That is not to say there is not an American within me because there is. I care deeply about the well-being of the ‘democratic’ society that I live in, was educated in, and has provided me with tremendous amount of opportunities for advancement that I probably would not have anywhere else.” Even so, Fathollahi takes pride in knowing that “the language I was taught to speak at home and the culture that I follow to this day all originate from the land of Persia with its rich history that dates back a thousand years. Iran is a diverse nation of varied landscape, ethnicity, languages, and, to a small degree, religion.” Although the majority of Fathollahi’s education revolved around western literature and arts, architecture, literature, and scientific advancement. Iranians have made immense contributions to advancement of society and humanity from the time of Cyrus and Darius to the present. The rich oral traditions that come from the great poets of Iran (Ferdowsi, Hafez, Saadi) are recited everyday by ordinary Iranians and discovered by western scholars throughout the world for their beauty and intellect. It is the sum of all these traditions that makes us proud to be born in Iran or to be descendants of Iranians.”

Similarly, Fathollahi knows non-Iranians who are also immersing themselves in Iranian culture and looking beyond shows like Shahs of Sunset, who only entertain their audience and do not “teach about the humanity and history of culture… I think most non-Iranians see it only as entertainment and not a broad perception of the Iranian community and their culture.” Equally, his experiences as a one-and-a-half-generation Iranian moving this country at a young age, Fathollahi finds that his experience assimilating into the United States is similar to other immigrants who are doing the same: “We all cling to language, traditions, and cultures while recognizing the privilege of living in a peaceful democratic society that is the United States of America.” Currently, Fathollahi is a Research and Development Leader in Life Science Research at Stanford University with a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Sanaz Rezai, 31, is a recent graduate from University of California, Los Angeles, with a Doctoral degree in Piano Performance, and currently works in UCLA’s music department. Throughout her years as a pianist, she has come to find that much of her music is influenced by the music of Iran. “I love the music and the food and the beautiful poems. I love how family, education, and being successful is very important to the Iranian people. Iranians have high standards in all aspects of life and I appreciate and respect that very much in our culture. I love how successful Iranians are in the U.S. I am so proud of how much Iranians have achieved outside of Iran and also inside of Iran. I appreciate very much knowing more about my heritage, history, and culture…” Rezai’s family moved to Austria nine months after she was born, which made the majority of her connection to Iran through her family. Since she was raised in Austria, the culture was easier for her to assimilate to. However, her assimilation to the American culture was complicated, owing to the fact that she “only spoke German and Farsi, and did not understand the American culture very well. Eventually... I learned English, and now I feel American, Iranian, and Austrian.” Even so, Rezai is able to take beliefs from both cultures and incorporate them into her own life: “I think I am very much Iranian but also not as conservative as Iranians. I have similar principles of Iranian views but I also connect with some of the wonderful aspects of the American culture. I think there are wonderful aspects of both cultures such as the respect and formality in the Iranian people but also the openness that is very much in the American culture.” Rezai claims that one of the most interesting aspects of the Iranian culture is the concept of tarof since “it shows deep respect for one another. There is a nice formality amongst Iranians, and I find that very respectful.” Furthermore, like Shahs of Sunset, “there are many reality shows that focus on a specific culture, but it can be very risky when viewers start stereotyping especially if they never have the opportunity to meet other Iranians…” In a broader sense, Rezai wishes that more people, both inside and outside of the Iranian community, recognize and appreciate the wide spectrum of lifestyles, and religious and political opinions of all Iranians.
Equally, Sasson Brumand, 50, finds that the “Shahs of Sunset” gives non-Iranians a misconception of what Iranians are all about. Not everybody’s into material things… and the more sensational and exaggerated, the higher the ratings.” Brumand moved to the United States after completing elementary school in his hometown of Mashhad. Brumand finished the remainder of his education in the United States by graduating from Temple University with his D.D.S. degree, and now owns his own practice for general dentistry. Although he moved to the United States at a young age, Brumand is “proud to have been born in Iran because of its rich history and culture that goes back thousands of years. Throughout our history we’ve made contributions to the world that unfortunately sometimes go unnoticed.” Despite the fact that he has spent most of his life in the United States, Brumand feels as though his identity is equally composed of both the Iranian and American cultures. He owes this to his “interest in the Persian culture and always giving every effort to learn more about it.” Farhang, among history and language, make Brumand more comfortable with the Iranian part of his identity. Brumand continues to closely hold onto the values that surround him and the Iranian culture.

In similar fashion to Brumand, Roxana Akbari, 19, finds Shahs of Sunset to be “exaggerated for entertainment purposes… I don’t think it represents the Iranian culture that I know and grew up with, but I also don’t think that non-Iranians would view it as the epitome of Iranian culture either.” Akbari has a strong connection to the Iranian community as an intern for the Iranian American Women’s Foundation. She is now beginning her second year at the University of California, Irvine, studying Political Science, and is interested in pursuing a career in public policy and law. She writes for UC Irvine’s Odyssey and does Persian dancing in her spare time. Akbari is proud of her heritage since she has found it to be “warm, welcoming, hospitable, and family-oriented. Family really is everything for Iranians. My happiest childhood memories took place at social gatherings with close family.” Notwithstanding, “dealing with the clash between the Iranian and American cultures has been quite challenging for me, personally. I was raised with cultural values centered around collectivism, dependence, and putting others’ needs before your own. Yet one day, I was exposed to American culture, which revolves around promoting individual success, independence, and competitiveness.” That day came when Akbari was twelve. Since she and her family remained close to their cultural ties, Akbari soon discovered that “there has always been a large contrast between what I’m exposed to inside and outside of home. Overcoming this has been a long, strenuous process, but I try to take the best moral values from both cultures and incorporate them into my own way of life.” Due to the fact that she perceives the world from the perspective of both cultures, she has been presented with “a unique worldview and a strong sense of compassion and tolerance for other global cultures, which guides me every day as I go through life. It has taught me to always sympathize with both sides of an argument and to respect others.” Akbari is proud that her birthplace of “Iran is a country with a rich, unique culture that has historically been under attack for thousands of years… yet somehow this beautiful culture has managed to survive through all of it. When I think of Iran, I think of a strong, compassionate population who has endured centuries of struggles, yet still manages to persist. The cornerstone of Iranian culture roots from the motto of Zoroastrianism, ‘good thoughts, good words, good deeds.’” Akbari’s passion for human rights, women’s rights, and global justice stems from her experiences and encounters, both inside and outside of her birth country.

Equally, Sina Ghaffarnejad, 17, finds the significance and beauty of belonging to two cultures: “The beauty of society is the fact that it is capable of blending cultures, taking two beautiful sides and making a rich and unique whole. As an Iranian-American, my culture is mixed with the gracefully rich traditions of Iran and the progressive and determined culture of America… Being born in a different country, I believe, adds a bit of depth into an individual’s story, their connections, and their experiences. I believe that a person’s story lengthens with every connection they build and every experience they go through.” Although he was born and raised in Tehran until moving to the United States at the age of five, Ghaffarnejad finds the memories he made in Iran to be held closer to his heart than the ones he has made in the United States. Despite this, he finds that the United States is truly a country where people from all walks of life are able to prosper and get their taste of the American Dream. Even so, Ghaffarnejad identifies more with the Iranian culture since he is constantly immersed in its traditions and media. In contrast, he describes Shahs of Sunset as an Americanized show that looks “for drama and conflict as their source of entertainment,” and does not accurately depict true Iranians. One of Ghaffarnejad’s fondest memories from his childhood in Iran is returning to the local mini-market to buy a second plastic soccer ball after the thorns in his grandparent’s garden deflated the first one. Additionally, he remembers “having the entire family gathering every night for dinner, setting up the Sofreh, and enjoying my grandmother’s amazing cooking. I remember the spirit of the nation on Chaharshanbe Suri, the livelihood of Shabe Yalda, and the joy of Nowruz. I have memories of growing up in Iran up to the point I said my goodbyes to my loved ones.” Although he moved to the United States after spending only five years in Iran, “these memories are the beginning to my story.” Ghaffarnejad is now finishing his last year at High Tech High North County while working at a startup pharmaceutical company with an emphasis in research and development.

One-and-a-half-generation Iranians have unique experiences from both the rich culture of Iran and the open culture of the United States. Although this group of immigrants has had its fair share of struggles, both countries have given them memories that they will cherish and pass on to younger generations.

Leily Rezvani is a student at High Tech High School, North County. She is also an intern at USD Institute for Peace and Justice.
Not Without My Daughter
By: Lisa Hildreth

As an American mom to a half-Iranian daughter who travels to Iran annually, I am often asked “You take your daughter to Iran? Is that even safe?” To be honest, at these times, I am grateful for my calm demeanor and Minnesota nice ability to pause and respond in a respectful manner. Inside, my stomach is in knots, and I am frustrated and angry with what feels to be rude and assumptive (and ignorant) questions. These questions and statements have come from friends, family members, and strangers alike. If you can even imagine this, they have even come from Iranians who have been living in the states and have not been back to Iran since the revolution.

I get it. Mainstream media has done quite a number on the perception of Iran. When Iran is mentioned in the news, it is almost always negative. And then there’s the movie “Not Without My Daughter” where Sally Fields portrayed a woman trying to flee Iran with her daughter due to an international child kidnapping. I can’t even tell you how many times I’ve been asked if I’ve seen this movie. While I feel bad for any mom who would go through domestic violence and have to fight to get her daughter back, this movie made all Iranians, especially men, look extremely bad. I know it was an overly dramatic Hollywood film and all, but Americans believed it. So many literally believed (and still believe) that that’s how Iranian men treat women, and that all Iranian families wear hijab in the house and abuse women. While I know there is good and bad people in every country, culture, and religion, I have yet to see any family in Iran be abusive and have only one family member who is faithful to her beliefs and wears hijab inside the home.

On the contrary, I have experienced quite the opposite on all of my trips to Iran over the past almost 20 years. I have experienced: having people be too nice and go overboard to the extreme to ensure that I’m having a good time and seeing all that I’d like to see; being fed way too much; extreme kindness from all strangers I’ve encountered (even while standing in line to buy Sangak by a fully robed/high ranking mullah); inquisitive children wanting to practice English with me, overjoyed to learn that I’m visiting from the US; and an overabundance curiousness and kindness towards my blonde haired daughter.

I am grateful for my relationship with the Iranian half of my family and on the contrary, I wouldn’t think of going to Iran without my daughter so that she can experience all of the amazing cultural and family experiences that makes Iran great.

Complete strangers in a pizza parlor wanting to meet us. (Tehran, Iran)

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Persian Cultural Center
Tel: (858) 552-9355 Fax & Voice: (619) 374-7335
www.pccus.org

Dornab Concert
Saturday November 19, 2016 at IAC 8:00PM
Tickets and Information: 858-552-9355

PCC Annual Bazaar
Sunday December 4, 2016
at Mt. Carmel High School/ISSD
Tickets and Information: 858-552-9355

Yalda Celebration
December 17, 2016 at Sufi Restaurant at 7:00PM
Tickets and Information: 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
Movie Night Dec 4, 2016 at 5:30pm
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Info: 858-552-9355

DOCU NIGHT
DocuNight September 7, 2016 at 7:00pm at IAC
DocuNight Nov 2 and Dec 7, 2016 at 7:00pm
at the Iranian-American Center (IAC)
Documentary films about Iran or by Iranians

Jong-e Farhangi
Friday, Nov 11, 2016 Jong-e Farangi, hosted by Ali Sadr
Friday, Dec 9, 2016 Jong-e Farhangi, hosted by Reza Khabazian
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
Branch I, September 11, 2016 10am-12noon
Branch II, September 8, 2016 6-8pm

We Celebrate International Children’s Day
Sunday, November 13 at ISSD

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

Dollar a Month Fund
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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, Balboa Park
www.thehouseofiran.com
Sundays 12:00-4:00pm
House of Iran Harvest Festival
Sunday November 13, 2016

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

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

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

NIAC National Iranian-American Council
www.niac.org

Book Club Meeting
Last Saturday of each month
Iranian-American Center (IAC)
6790 Top Gun St. #7, San Diego, CA 92121
Tel (858) 552-9355

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

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

Balam Park December Nights
House of Hospitality
San Diego, CA 92101
http://www.balboapark.org/decembernights
Date: December 2 - 3, 2016
Time: 12:00 PM to 11:00 PM
Friday’s fun starts at 3:00 PM

San Diego Bay Parade of Lights
http://www.sdparadeoflights.org/
Downtown, Coronado, Point Loma Peninsula
Date: December 11 - 18, 2016, Time: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Whale & Dolphin Watching Adventures
970 N Harbor Dr, San Diego, CA 92101 619.686.8715
http://www.hornblower.com/hce/port/overview/sd+whalewatching
Date: December 10, 2016 - April 30, 2017
Time: 9:30 AM to 5:00 PM

San Diego Jazz Fest
500 Hotel Cir. North, San Diego, CA 92108 619.297.5277
http://www.sdjazzfest.org/Buy Tickets
Date: November 23 - 27, 2016

San Diego Jazz Fest
500 Hotel Cir. North, San Diego, CA 92108 619.297.5277
http://www.sdjazzfest.org/Buy Tickets
Date: November 23 - 27, 2016

70th Annual Mother Goose Parade
619.333.0771
http://www.mothergooseparade.org/
East County
Date: November 20 - November 20, 2016
Time: 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM
More than 1000 Syrian refugees have arrived in San Diego County since May 2016 due to one of the worst humanitarian disasters in recent history. And additional 1000 are anticipated to arrive in 2017. San Diego has been named by The New York Times as one of the top welcoming city to Syrian refugees. Refugees are challenged with an overwhelming amount of emotions as they arrive.

Not only are they forced to leave their homes and their belongings not knowing if they will ever return, but they now are entering a new place they must call home. This new home may be a place very unfamiliar to them in terms of language and customs. Furthermore, rather than having time to adjust to these changes, they are forced to quickly find a way to provide income for their homes and families not knowing who they can trust or who they can turn to for support.

The government-funded resettlement agencies are doing all they can to help these families. The families receive a small amount of money to last for the first 3 months of rent, deposit and home furnishings. Due to the large number of cases, the resettlement agencies have been overwhelmed. Some refugee families are being placed in motels for weeks due to the lack of housing.

A group of dedicated Syrian American community members of San Diego have come together and formed a non-profit organization called (SCN) Syrian Community Network - San Diego in September of 2016. SCN-San Diego is a chapter of the Chicago based organization started in 2014 to support the incoming and newly resettled Syrian asylees as they acclimate to their new home, connecting families to the services and resources of the community. The SCN is a refugee support organization providing services which include help with adjustment for newly resettled refugees, assistance in finding English as Second Language classes, help securing employment, case management, rent supplement program and much more. SCN does not replace but partners with resettlement agencies in San Diego to help fill the gaps and educate resettlement case workers and local schools about Syrian culture. SCN is a secular and non-profit organization and is committed to the successful resettlement of the Syrian refugees.

Because of the high demand for apartment rentals in the resettlement areas, the rent price has increased, therefore making it impossible to afford rent. These families, many with special needs children who are acclimating to the new culture and environment, are expected to begin working within three months of arrival with no language and no educational background. The reception and placement money they receive is depleted quickly due to the long stays in motels until the resettlement agencies are able to locate housing for the families.

The average rent for a two bedroom apartment in the refugee resettlement area is $1400. After the first three months, a family of five would qualify for cash aid of $954 per month. Most families are coming up on their first three months in San Diego. For some, employment was facilitated; but for many with no English language, it has been difficult at the moment to facilitate any employment. Families are beginning to struggle with being able to pay rent. SCN-San Diego is looking for businesses in San Diego who would be interested in hiring. Most of the Syrian refugees arriving are skilled in the home remodeling industry, others in the restaurant and alteration business. These are skilled people who are looking to work hard for their living; they only need to be given a chance. Please contact us with any questions: Bayanne@SyrianCommunityNetwork.org and check out our Facebook page

Let’s Join Forces and Help Syrian Refugees

Penk No. 166 November-December 2016
EVERY WOMAN HAS MET TRUMP
By: Shay Hanson

Every woman has had to deal with a Donald Trump in her life, maybe several. Every woman has to deal with the consequences of the Trump mentality—a mentality that can affect us at the most crucial times in life, like getting hired, promoted, fired, maternity pay, equal pay, equal respect and credit in the workplace, equal respect and credit in the home, and the list goes on…. So when the “pussy-grabbing” tape came to light and Trump attempted to make light of it, and then denied assaulting women, and then mocked his accusers who came forward, women instantly recognized him. We knew he was lying. We have known the various iterations of this type of man all of our lives. It’s no surprise, then, that there is a historical gender gap in voting this election season.

While women have different personal stories, I am sure most go something like mine. The first time I noticed a man looking me up and down in a way that made me feel uncomfortable was when I was 12. My body had matured fast and I already had the proportions of a woman. At school, the boys began to rank the girls by chest size; I was first on the list. I began to get wolf-whistles on the street from construction workers if I wore anything even slightly dressed up or revealing, which left me feeling vulnerable, scared, and sick to my stomach. I even remember one of my female teachers telling my mother, supposedly jokingly, that I had a bigger chest than hers. I had always been a tomboy, but all of a sudden I could not run and play with the boys like I used to do.

I began to hate my body. I wore oversized clothes to de-emphasize my curves and chest. I felt like nature had taken my childhood away from me. I was too young to realize that the way society handled female sexuality was the real culprit. When I look back at the wolf-whistles, always accompanied by lewd comments and raucous laughter, and the unabashed physical assessment of my frame in men’s predatory looks, I feel sorry for the 12, 13, 14, 15, 16-year-old me. I still cannot fathom how grown men, probably parents and grandparents themselves, could treat a young girl in that way.

Unchecked, and legitimized as “locker room talk,” this attitude of reducing women to their physical sum parts and feeling entitled to act on that perception, seeps into the workplace, the grocery store, the bar, college campuses…all aspects of life. By the time women are adults, we have already learned to read even the most subtle signs of a lecherous creep in action. We see and intuit things that others overlook. And sometimes, even in the face of overt harassment, abuse, or assault, we stay silent for fear of being blamed and shamed, or disbelieved…because the legitimacy of what happens to us began long ago, in the locker rooms of Trump’s world.

That is why I made my 13-year-old son watch the taped Access Hollywood comments by Trump and the way he and Billy Bush discussed women. I looked my son in the eye and told him that if he EVER spoke that way about any girl or woman I would be ashamed of him. That is why when Michelle Obama gave her speech in New Hampshire about Trump’s comments, outlining the things that hurt us as girls, I cried. That is why I feel PTSD when men do the same thing to my 15-year-old daughter. Luckily, we have progressed enough that she experiences it less than I did. But for me, that familiar sick feeling takes over and I just want to scream.

As for those women who are defiantly stating they will continue to support Trump, they must be suffering from some kind of Stockholm Syndrome as far as I am concerned. I mean, this goes beyond politics. This is a question of culture, decency, and the future of our children. When Trump says nobody has more respect for women than he does, as women we need to stand up and say, “We have met you before, we know you, and that is not the type of respect we want.”
6- Weight management

By Mohammad Ahrar, PHD

Introduction
Weight management is a broad subject and requires various discussions, including knowing the healthy weight, caloric intake, physical activities, and other factors that can affect weight gain or weight loss. Because of the limited space allocated to the science section in Peyk, we will discuss the basics of weight management in two or three short articles. In these articles, we try to avoid any suggestions or comments about weight management; the information is merely for your information.

Healthy weight
According to a Mayo Clinic report, “from a health perspective, “normal” or “healthy” weight is statistically correlated to good health.” However, there are many other factors besides weight that affect the health of an individual. In regards to a healthy weight, there are guidelines established by different research institutions that show a range of healthy weight for men and women. The most commonly used guideline is the Body Mass Index (BMI).

The Body Mass Index (BMI)
BMI is an index based on the proportion of weight to the height of an individual, and is an indicator for showing percentage of fat in a body. It is an effective way to evaluate whether a person is in a healthy weight range, overweight, or obese. The major limitation of using BMI is that it does not distinguish adipose tissue from muscle or water gain. For example, the BMI for muscular athletes or people with edema overestimates their body fat. In addition, the interpretation of the index is slightly different for children and teens, and varies with age and gender. However, the BMI is widely used and gives a fairly accurate assessment of how much of your body is composed of fat, and whether your weight is in a healthy range.

How BMI is calculated
There are many ways that BMI can be calculated, including using different formulas and charts. There are also online sources that automatically calculate your BMI, using your height and weight (4, 5). The following chart, which is suggested by the U.S. government, can be used to find your BMI. Simply find your weight on the left column and your height on the top row. According to the chart, BMI below 18.5 is considered underweight. The values 18.5 to 24.9 are considered normal or healthy weight (shown in the green zone), while values 25 – 29.5 are considered overweight, and values above 30 signify obesity.

The interplay of weight and health
The first step in weight management is to know your weight. Although a BMI of 18.5 or lower is considered underweight, it does not necessarily represent a healthy weight. Likewise, though the values between 25 and 29.9 are considered overweight, they may not necessarily represent unhealthy weight because athletes and muscular people may fall in this range, and muscles weigh more than fat. However, a BMI value higher than 30 is considered obese. Results of some studies at the U.S. Center of Disease Control and Prevention indicate that “obesity (BMI > 30) is associated with increased incidence of serious health problems.” Reports from Harvard Medical School indicates that although overweight and obesity are not the same, but “obesity is a serious, chronic disease that can inflict substantial harm to a person’s health.”
Because of the seriousness of obesity in our community, we summarize the results of some medical studies about the relation of obesity and health as listed below. The results are based on statistics, and they are only for your information.

- It has been shown that problems with high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), coronary heart disease, and stroke occur more often in obese people compared to those who are not obese.
- Obesity is the major cause of insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. Even moderate obesity dramatically increases the risk of diabetes. (Insulin resistance was briefly mentioned in Peyk 165.)
- Studies at Harvard Medical School indicate that sleep apnea and respiratory problems are more prevalent in obese people.
- People with extremely high BMI are also more at risk for breathing problems, certain cancers, and gallbladder disease.
- Obesity can affect the knees and hips, and results in body pain and difficulty with physical functioning because of additional stress placed on the joints by extra weight.
- Mental illness such as clinical depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders are more common in obese people.

Other research shows that overweight women are at increased risk for breast and uterus cancer, and overweight men are at higher risk for colon and prostate cancers.

**Major causes of obesity**

In many ways, obesity is a puzzling disease, and how the body regulates weight and body fat is not well understood. On one hand, the cause appears to be simple in that if a person consumes more calories than he or she expends as energy, then he or she will gain weight. However, the risk factors that determine obesity can be a complex combination of genetics, socioeconomic and metabolic factors, and lifestyle choices, as well as other medical factors. Studies also show that fat tissues produce different proteins and hormone-like chemicals that cause inflammation, increase LDL (so called bad cholesterol) in arteries, and can cause insulin resistance. The more fat tissue we accumulate, the more unfavorable chemicals are produced in our body, and therefore, we may be at more risk for higher LDL, type 2 diabetes, and other health complication. (See Peyk 161 for information about LDL).

**Conclusion**

Normal or healthy weight is correlated to good health. BMI can be used as a guideline to find out if our weight is in healthy range. Obesity is a serious, chronic disease and can result in substantial health problems. If you have any weight concerns, you should consult with your doctor. In the next issue of Peyk, we will discuss ways to control body weight, and how nutrition and food intake can affect our weight.

**Selected references:**


**EGGPLANT RICE (BADEMJAN POLOW)**

**Ingredients:**

1. 1 LB (453g) Rice
2. 1.5 LB (680 g) Eggplants
3. 8 oz (227g) Ground Beef
4. 1 Tomato, Vegetable Oil, Curry Powder, Turmeric; Salt, Black Pepper

**Preparations:**

1. Combine rice, 1 tbsp salt, and enough water to cover the rice 2 inch deep
2. Soak for at least 4 hours.
3. Dice the onion and tomatoes.
4. Peel and slice the eggplants.

**Directions:**

1. Fry the eggplant with vegetable oil on both sides. Adding salt on each side.
2. In a separate pot, fry the diced onions with vegetable oil until golden.
3. Stir in the beef and continue frying until the beef just turns brown.
4. Stir in curry powder, turmeric and pepper.
5. Stir in the tomatoes and continue sizzling for couple of more minutes.
6. Boil the soaked rice for 10-15 minutes over medium heat.
7. Drain and rinse the rice with cold water few times.
8. Grease a large pot with vegetable oil (approx.. 2 tbsp).
9. Transfer half of the rice over onto the pot.
10. Top the rice with a layer of beef mixture.
11. Top the beef with a layer of eggplant.
12. Cover with the remaining of the rice.
13. Mix 2 tbsp of vegetable oil with salt and 2 tbsp water and pour over the rice
14. Cover the post with paper towel and a lid.
15. Cook for 30 minutes or until well cooked.

The visual of this recipe can be viewed at aashpazi.com
This nonfiction story is inspired by my family’s failed attempts at being “tech savvy.” Most recently, my parents have become very consumed with Uber, a car service similar to taxi cabs. To use Uber, you must download the Uber app on a smartphone. This story navigates my family’s inability to use technology correctly, and their most recent (failed) attempt to use Uber.

Dad: It was a little strange—I had to put in our address for the app. Did you have to do that too?
Ladan (nervously): What else did they ask, Dad? Did they ask for your social?
Dad: No, no, it was the app! But they asked some unexpected questions. And at the end, they said “welcome to the family.”

Ladan: They are saying it on Mom’s Facebook and then they call you and wish you a happy birthday over the phone.
Madar Jan: But how do I know who is using my Facebook?
Ladan: You don’t have a Facebook; you have to create your own.
Madar Jan: How do you know that someone hasn’t already made me one? What’s the difference?

Ladan spent the afternoon explaining that it is impossible for Madar Joon to have a Facebook because she does not have a smart device, and no one has created a Facebook for her. Defeated, she left the conversation saying nemidoonam (I don’t know) and nemishe (I guess it can’t happen).

Most recently, we took an Uber to a family function. My parents were so pleased with the service and surprised by how easy it was to use their new favorite phrase to anyone who needed a ride or needed a car became “just Uber it!” (a common phrase that is exchanged to mean “just request an Uber car as your ride”).

When we taught our mother how to use the GPS in the car, we explained that the house icon on the map identifies a house address. By selecting the house icon, the GPS will navigate you to anyone’s home address included in the address book, once you “click” a name. Not realizing she had to “click” a name, she leaned forward, her face a few inches from the GPS, and said Nahid’s house, the name of her best friend. She did not understand that the GPS was not voice automated, or that the car was not on. This is still a joke in our family and when something goes wrong, we look at each other and say Nahid’s house.

Well, bacheha (kiddos), I figured it out! I made quick eye contact with my younger sister as I passed the salad, waiting for what we both knew was going to be an incredible statement from our father. I downloaded Uber today! Ladan immediately put her hand on her forehead and looked down, as if to say “it’s your turn. I’ve tried.” I did my best to disguise my laughter, but I knew this was going to be the next big family story. It was hard not to laugh. You see, it is impossible for my father to download the Uber app—he has a flip phone, one that doesn’t have the technology to use the internet, let alone an app. But the root of this story is much deeper.

My family’s inconsistent success with technology is our only reminder of our failed attempt at technological integration. The second-generation children, grandchildren, and cousins all have a reminder of our failed attempt at technological integration. The second-generation children, grandchildren, and cousins all have a system in place to help us decide who helps with each technology fail so no one is obligated to help two times in a row. So far, that has also been unsuccessful.

One afternoon, shortly after my grandmother returned from her trip to Iran, she approached Ladan, who was playing on her phone:

Madar Jan: Ladan, can you go on and see what my Facebook says?
Ladan: Madar Jan, you don’t have a Facebook.
Madar Jan: Doesn’t everyone have one? Hasan has one, Habib has one, Nилоофар and the triplets have one. All my cousins in Iran have Facebook. Your Mom says they always say happy birthday to me; how do they say happy birthday if I don’t have a Facebook?

What can I say? It runs in the family.

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.
Abdominal pain is one of the top symptoms that drive patients to the doctor’s office and Emergency Room (ER). It also happens to be one of those symptoms with a seemingly never ending list of causes. It can range from anything as benign as gas to as life-threatening as a perforated, bleeding stomach ulcer. How do you know when it is serious? When should you run to the ER and when should you wait to see your doctor in the office? What signs and symptoms should you look out for?

**ANATOMY OF AN ABDOMEN**

Before grasping the possibilities of abdominal pain, it’s essential to discern the location of the pain. Doctors divide the abdomen (the entire region below the ribs down to the groin) into 5 main regions, or “quadrants.”

**Left Lower Quadrant:**
The “descending colon” (the segment of the colon that pushes stool downward, hence the term “descending”) and sigmoid colon (the structure that feeds into the rectum and anus where stool exits) rest in the left lower quadrant. Hence, this is the most common site for patients who experience constipation, gas, and diverticulitis (inflammation of the outpouchings of the colon).

In females, the left ovary and fallopian tube also reside in and further complicate the left lower quadrant, the site for painful ovarian cysts, and more serious and severe ectopic pregnancies (pregnancies into the fallopian tube).

**Right Lower Quadrant:**
Similar to the left lower, the right lower quadrant also houses an ovary and fallopian tube. Therefore, besides the medical etiologies mentioned above that can wreak havoc on the female reproductive organs and in the colon, the appendix sits in the right lower quadrant of the abdomen. This is the famous site of the dreaded appendicitis, the severely painful inflammation of the appendix that requires surgical removal as the only cure. This pain often begins around the belly button, and once the appendix bursts the pain moves and localizes in the right lower quadrant. Appendicitis is an emergency.

**Left Upper Quadrant:**
Besides the location of the pivoting colon at this site, there’s not much more. The spleen sits in the left upper abdomen, but spleen etiologies of abdominal pain are rare. The most common issue with the spleen is enlargement in size. And in that case, a mass is often palpable on exam at that site – the enlarged spleen being the “mass” (very rare).

**Right Upper Quadrant:**
The liver sits behind the lowest ribs on the right upper quadrant, as does the adjacent gallbladder. The gallbladder stores a substance called “bile” that is released in response to ingestion of fatty foods. Bile helps to emulsify and digest fatty foods in the diet.

Gallstones can get stuck in the “bile duct” that drains the gallbladder once it squeezes in response to fatty meals. These patients often experience very severe pain -- “worse than childbirth,” I often hear. And removal of the gallbladder is imperative.

Gallstones become life-threatening when they evolve into “cholangitis,” an emergent and serious condition of the right upper quadrant causing inflammation of the bile ducts that are plugged with a stone. Patients experience severe right upper quadrant pain, fever, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the white part of the eyes) in cholangitis.

Part of the colon also spends time in the right upper quadrant.

**Epigastric Quadrant:**
This is referred to as the central upper region of the stomach that sits right below the “sternum,” the firm midline bone of the central chest. The actual “stomach” is located at this site, and is by far one of the top culprits of abdominal pain. This is because heartburn, acid reflux, gastritis (inflammation of the lining of the stomach), and stomach ulcers are all located in this region.

In addition, the pancreas sits behind the stomach, and patients with severe pain from pancreatitis experience pain in the epigastric region as well. Just to name a few, pancreatitis can be caused by excessive alcohol intake, stones in the gallbladder (that cause a backup of inflammation from the bile duct into the pancreas), medications, and elevated triglyceride levels.

**WHEN TO WORRY ABOUT ABDOMINAL PAIN**

So now that you know what organs lie in and which medical conditions plague each region of the abdomen, the next step is to become familiar with some of the more concerning symptoms and features of the pain that may require more urgent or emergent attention.

Please remember that these are simply guidelines that are very general, and do not apply to every circumstance. You should always consult your doctor when it comes to your own personal health. Words on a page should never replace your own doctor’s assessment and judgment – otherwise Google University would be handing out a lot of medical degrees.

Here are some more concerning signs of abdominal pain to be aware of:

- **Severity:**
  - If your pain is severe, do not ignore it. Pain is the way your body communicates that there is something wrong. In general, the more severe, the more concerning the abdominal pain is.
• **Intractable Vomiting:**
  Vomiting to the point of dehydration is concerning. Even with such nasty viruses as the stomach flu and food poisoning, despite being self-resolving, what lands patients in the hospital is dehydration. So if you cannot replenish the fluid that is being lost, then you need to be seen for possible intravenous fluid administration.

• **Bloody Vomit:**
  Losing blood, whether it is bright red or “coffee-ground” appearing, is considered urgent and sometimes emergent. Bleeding stomach ulcers and esophageal varices (common in those with liver cirrhosis) are two of the most common reasons that patients experience blood in their vomit.

• **Bloody or Black Stools:**
  Similarly, bloody or black stools are not a good sign either. Sure, benign hemorrhoids are the most common reason for bright red blood in the stool with bowel movements (especially when constipated), but bleeding stomach ulcers, bacterial infections (but they tend to also cause bloody diarrhea), diverticulosis (outpouchings of the colon), anal fissures (think of them as “cuts” in the skin that can bleed), colon polyps, and cancer of the colon (although bleeding tends to be microscopic and not always visible with cancer) are also possibilities.

• **Weight Loss:**
  If the abdominal pain is chronic to the point of causing weight loss, it requires medical attention. Unintentional weight loss that is persistent through time is concerning.

• **Persistent Fever:**
  Viruses can cause fevers, and they are not necessarily worrisome since they lack a cure and are self-resolving (unless dehydrated, as mentioned above). But a fever can also be caused by appendicitis, cholangitis, diverticulitis, and other serious inflammatory conditions of the abdomen.

• **Jaundice:**
  Jaundice occurs from buildup of a substance called “bile” which is produced in the liver and stored in the gallbladder, and its function is to digest fat in the digestive tract when consumed. Therefore, disorders of the liver (such as in hepatitis) or gallbladder (such as with gallstones and cholangitis) produce jaundice. It requires urgent and often emergent care.

It is also important to mention that certain patient populations are considered higher risk when it comes to abdominal pain. These include those with HIV or any immune compromise, diabetics, women (naturally due to a more complex reproductive anatomy), and the elderly population (who tend to present more atypically with non-specific symptoms, and have a higher rate of mortality). A lower threshold to seek medical care is highly advisable in these groups.

Also, just as in learning the English language, there is an exception to almost every rule in medicine. That means that even though we are discussing common red flags to be aware of, there are always patients who also present rather atypically. Therefore, it is better to err on the side of caution and consult your doctor, rather than to ignore something uncertain.

**Dr. Sanaz Majd is a board-certified family medicine physician who podcasts and blogs at http://housecalldoctor.quickanddirtytips.com.**

As a young girl in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, Sara Safari experienced firsthand the oppressive, restrictive environment that enables the sex-trafficking trade to thrive. Later on in life, she became a neophyte climber who gave up her new hobby when she found the challenges and physical rigors too difficult. She wondered why anyone would subject himself or herself to such danger and discomfort, just to be able to say he or she stood on top of the world. Sara needed an incentive far greater than mere personal achievement and eventually she found that motivation in the plight of the girls in Nepal. She discovered that Nepalese girls’ best defense against becoming trafficking victims was simply the ability to go to school at a cost of US $170 per year. So Sara took on climbing mountains in earnest to raise money for “Empower Nepali Girls” organization, with the final goal to climb Mount Everest and plant the flag of her charitable organization.

In April 2015, this 5’4,” 125-pound woman felt strong and ready for the arduous climb after having spent more than two years training and preparing for the adventure. At 20,000 feet, Sara was climbing the last few meters of the infamous Khumbu Icefall, the most dangerous part of the ascent, when a devastating earthquake rocked the country. At this point in the climb, Sara was on a 40-foot ice wall. The wall began to rock back and forth, back and forth while she hung on for dear life. Then huge pieces of ice the size of cars began to break off the mountain and began crashing around her. Then came the avalanche. The noise was deafening.

At this point, Sara was convinced she was going to die and two thoughts went through her head. One was that she was very sad for her husband, her family, and all those she would leave behind. The other was that hers had been a life worth living, a life that made a difference.

Sara miraculously survived the earthquake that killed more than 10,000 people, left more than 100,000 children without homes, and completely destroyed the Base Camp. Unlike most of the climbers who attempt Everest for personal glory, this woman risked her life in order to bring greater attention to the thousands of girls in Nepal who are trafficked into sex slavery or forced into early marriage. While grateful to have survived the earthquake, Sara was miffed that after so many hard years of training, she had not made her goal to reach the top of Everest and the media interest she felt that would have brought to her cause. However, God had a better plan for Sara. The fact that she had survived the earthquake brought even more attention to her cause than if she had reached the top of Everest, and thus empowered her to raise even more money than she had originally planned.

Sara Safari continues to be an advocate for social justice around the world. She fights for women’s rights and has received the Global Citizenship Award for her outstanding work with Empower Nepali Girls. Her inspirational book about her life changing experience, spiritual redemption and a search for social justice is called “Follow My Footsteps”. She is donating all of the profits from the book to “Empower Nepali Girls.”