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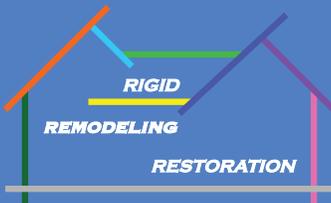
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Shaghayegh Hanson



PEYK BROUGHT ME HOME

The first time I ever read *Peyk*, I had two seemingly contradictory sensations. The focus on Iranian culture made me feel homesick for my family, most of whom were in London, but I also felt more at home because the pages I was reading were introducing me to a community, right here, that was deeply resonant of the very one I was missing. The more I read, the more I felt a long-standing cultural void begin to fill. I had been so starved of anything Iranian that I read the entire English section in one sitting, with almost a childlike glee.

Let me back up. When I first moved to the U.S. in the early 90s, I lived in Iowa, the place where my then-new husband was from. It was a culture shock in many ways for a girl from London. For almost a decade thereafter, the only time I got to eat Iranian food or see other Iranians or speak Persian was when I went back to London or visited my relatives in Toronto. I began to equate my presence in America with the absence of all things Iranian. Even cooking Persian food presented obstacles; there were no Persian grocery stores and the regular supermarkets carried a limited choice of spices. And though beef was to be found aplenty, lamb was neither available nor desired by Midwesterners.

Don't get me wrong, I loved my time in Iowa. I spent my entire 20s there, establishing a rewarding career, making lifelong friends, and gaining an appreciation for the outdoors and nature. But being an anomaly was slowly creating a lonely place inside me, the size of which grew over the years. I didn't know how much I missed my ethnic side or needed it until it was gifted back to me that first time I read *Peyk* and realized I wasn't alone in that need. The fact that there was an English language side was key. Having left Iran at the age of six, I wasn't schooled in reading or writing Persian and *Peyk* accommodated for that, an inclusive gesture that acknowledged the evolution of our collective immigration story. I have yet to come across another Iranian American publication that affords due respect to Iranian voices expressed in English. As our second and third generations come to dominate our cultural landscape, Persian-language-only publications will be excluding the majority of those in our communities.

After that first time reading *Peyk*, I expressed my gratitude to Ali Sadr, editor-in-chief, then and now. The rest is history. He asked me to submit an article and pretty soon I had my own column, a place where I felt safe and understood as I shared the ups and downs of straddling the chasm between Iranian and Western cultures. Over the years, the focus of my articles changed and I grew as a writer. *Peyk* not only gave me a home, but it nurtured an abiding love for culture and community, a love that motivates our writers and guides our board. To Shahri Estakhry, Reza Khabazian, and Rahim Mohammady, who got this party started in the first place, you are the giants and visionaries upon whose shoulders we stand. Thank you. And to our beloved readers, this house was built for you, may you always feel at home here.

Persian Cultural Center's Bilingual Magazine

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PCC Foundation

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PCC's Board Meetings

Persian Cultural Center's board of directors holds its meetings every second Wednesday of the month at the Iranian American Center (IAC). The last two meetings took place on July 14 and August 11, 2021.

Jong-e Farhangi – July 16, 2021

July Jong was an online event hosted by Ali Sadr. Guest Shahrokh Yadegari, PhD, a composer/sound designer and a professor at the music department at the University of California, San Diego, discussed "From Khayyam to electronic music." A question and answer period followed the discussion. The video of this program is available on PCC's YouTube channel: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1vnkoT9Lsk&t=74s>).



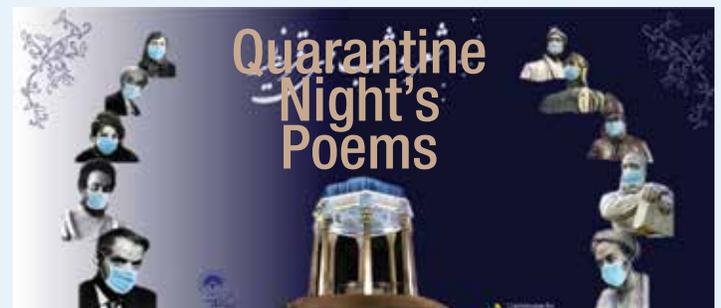
Three Chefs in the Kitchen – July 17, 2021

Three Chefs in the Kitchen, PCC's cooking program, was once again hosted by chefs Sima Kashani, Zhaleh Shayan, and Venus Safaie. Guests Arash Samei and his daughter Sofie from the Iranian School learned how to prepare mixed spaghetti (Iranian style) with tahdig and garnished bell peppers. The video of this program is available on PCC's YouTube channel: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZytMVL0r20>).



Quarantine Night's Poems – July 21, 2021

In this virtual event hosted by Farshad Babakhani and PCC's Poetry & Literature Committee, poems from *Onsori* were read and attendees also read their own selected poetry.



Virtual Movie Discussion Series – July 29, 2021

The Hunt (2012) and *Another Round* (2020), both directed by Thomas Vinterberg and starring actors such as Mads Mikkelsen, Alexandra Rapaport, Thomas Bo Larsen, and Annika Wedderkopp, were the movies selected for the July virtual movie discussion. Mahmoud Pirouzian hosted the discussion. Mr. Alireza Akhavan Deilami, a filmmaker and photographer, reviewed the movies.

Three Chefs in the Kitchen – August 21, 2021

Sima Kashani, Zhaleh Shayan, and Venus Safaie showed viewers how to make adas polo (lentil rice) with "rainbow" topping and classic mast o khiar (yogurt and cucumber).

Virtual Movie Discussion Series – August 26, 2021

The classic movie *The Shining* (1980), directed by Stanley Kubrick and starring Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall, Scatman Crothers, and Danny Lloyd, was the movie selected for the August virtual movie discussion. Mahmoud Pirouzian hosted the discussion, at which Mazyar Ghalami, an actor, writer, and director, was the guest of the program who reviewed the movie.



Peyk's 30th Anniversary: A Retrospective

As a member of *Peyk's* editorial board and its English language copy editor for more than a decade, I celebrate *Peyk's* longevity and cultural impact along with everyone else involved in this endeavor. When we were preparing this issue, I realized I did not know *Peyk's* origin story or how it grew from humble beginnings to the magazine it is today. To find out more and let our readers in on *Peyk's* remarkable history, I was fortunate to interview three of my colleagues on the editorial board: Mr. Reza Khabazian, who initiated the newsletter that is the foundation of today's magazine; Ms. Shahri Estakhry, who has taken on myriad roles and responsibilities at *Peyk* over the past 30 years; and Mr. Ali Sadr, *Peyk's* current and longtime editor-in-chief. These interviews have been condensed and edited for clarity.

~Rachel Tait

Peyk's Inception: A PCC Newsletter Is Born

Rachel Tait (RT): *Hi Reza, thank you for taking the time out to go down memory lane with me. I understand that in 1991, as a board member of Persian Cultural Center (PCC), you volunteered to start the "PCC Newsletter." What compelled you and PCC to start a newsletter about the Iranian American community here in San Diego?*

Reza Khabazian (RK): From the time I became a board member in 1991, I realized the need for having a publication as a means to communicate with the Iranian community at large. At that time, in the absence of today's social media, the task of communicating with the public could only be accomplished with some sort of newsletter. I introduced the idea to the board and easily got their approval. PCC was not in a financial position to cover the cost of such a publication, so I suggested that every board member sponsor the cost of one issue. With eleven board members at the time, I figured we could publish for almost one year.

RT: *What do you remember about the first few issues of the newsletter?*

RK: The first issue was a single page. The content was written by hand in Persian and sent to a friend (Mr. Mohammady) for typing and another friend (Mr. Heydari) for printing, free of charge of course. After the first five monthly newsletters, the issue was raised at the board to encourage the community's business owners to sponsor us by having an advertisement in our newsletter. Then the cost of the sixth issue was covered with advertisements.

RT: *How long were you involved with the newsletter?*

RK: Overall I stayed in charge for 7 or 8 issues before Ms. Shahri Estakhry, with the help of Mr. Mohammady, came to the rescue—this automatically improved the quality of our newsletter, such as having an English page and going beyond a mere newsletter by including some educational and cultural essays.



RT: *Producing a newsletter before computers were commonplace must have been difficult. What was the process like?*

RK: The printing process, from start to finish, was painful and at the same time was comical! Let me tell you about it, it went something like this:

- Writing the entire content by hand (first 3-hour meeting).
- Typing with the help of only one finger!
- Sending to a friend who had access to a laser printer.
- Adjusting the different parts of the content to set in a desired format (second meeting of 4 to 6 hours).
- Setting the pieces on a final draft using Cut and Paste.
- Taking the final draft to the printing shop, whose owner thankfully only charged us just his cost for printing 300 copies.
- Putting on address labels (third meeting of 3 to 4 hours).
- Delivering copies to the post office and Iranian stores (additional 4 to 5 hours).
- Begging the store owners for a better display of the newsletter (endless hours!!).

Growing Pains: From Newsletter to Magazine

RT: *Let me turn now to Ms. Estakhry—thank you for joining us today! I know you are one of the founders of the Persian Cultural Center and one of the original board members. Mr. Khabazian credits you with improving the newsletter process. How did you become involved with the PCC newsletter in the first place?*

Shahri Estakhry (SE): Originally, the purpose of the one-page newsletter was for PCC to communicate with the community and let them know of our programs and familiarize them with PCC's

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agenda. I got involved because I wanted to help Mr. Khabazian.

RT: Did you take over responsibility of the PCC newsletter right after Mr. Khabazian?

SE: No, not right away, we had other PCC board members work on it for a while.

RT: How long were you in charge of the newsletter?

SE: I really don't remember how long, but honestly it seemed forever. Let's just say YEARS that made me grow older and older!

RT: Ha! I understand. During your time, what changes took place in the appearance and quality of the newsletter?

SE: During our time—I say “our” because here much credit goes to Rahim Mohammady, who carried the heavy burden of making sure we were on time and the haul of everything—it was the era of “cut and paste” as I call it. We didn't have the luxury of today's computer systems nor the brilliancy of [Peyk's graphic designer] Saeed Jalali, so we became creative and did what we could. The era of cut and paste finally ended—with special thanks to Dr. Shahrokh Ahkami of Persian Heritage, who introduced to us the Farabi team in New Jersey—and thus began a professional system for the newsletter. The Farabi team's work was terrific and a great help to us, freeing us up to take care of the distribution. During this time, we added a few English pages and I think we went from four to eight and then to sixteen pages per issue.

RT: How many copies were being distributed at the time, do you remember?

SE: Before the newsletter transformed into the present *Peyk*, I think we had around 2,000 distributions per issue. Remember, back then, it was just for a San Diego audience.

RT: At what point did the newsletter become *Peyk*? And when did it become bilingual?

SE: We had a tug of war before we decided to go with *Peyk* as the name and, though I was initially against the name change, now I'm glad we did, it is a great name. The reason it became bilingual was for our English-speaking audience from the young people to many spouses and friends who could and would enjoy learning about our cultural heritage and be encouraged to be part of our community, i.e., people like yourself. I think one priority for any immigrant group is to learn and communicate in the language of their host country. In general, we are good at that.

RT: What was the most difficult part of working on the newsletter/magazine?

SE: The cut and paste era and when the hours ran into 2-3 a.m. Sometimes I was so exhausted that by the time I got home, I just kicked my shoes off and jumped on my bed with all my clothes still on just to get three hours of sleep before having to get up and get ready for work. Then we wonder why we grow old so quickly!

RT: What different roles have you taken on with respect to *Peyk*? Do you have a favorite contribution?

SE: Ha, ha, I've had many roles... from cutting and pasting to editor-in-chief (though I never gave myself the title) to writing the English editorial. Again, all with the usual tug of war to keep the English and Persian editorial sections separate and by different people. Woohoo, we won and the English editorial, as I always have hoped, is still under the vision of a woman [Shaghayegh Hanson]. The outlook of thoughts of different individuals is what makes *Peyk* so unique, and of course, women perceive everything differently and thus should have a separate voice in *Peyk*.

I look at *Peyk* as the voice for our community and its growth in our new homeland. Not everyone may agree with or like some of the content that it contains, but we don't write or publish to please a few individuals; we educate and move forward with what is right, just, and best for us as a community of new immigrants in this vast new country of ours.

The Modernizing of *Peyk* Magazine

RT: And this brings me to *Peyk*'s current and longtime editor-in-chief, Ali Sadr. Ali, how did you first become involved with *Peyk*?

Ali Sadr (AS): I personally joined PCC's board of directors in 1992 and have been involved with *Peyk* ever since, one way or another. For the purpose of this interview, I went through *Peyk*'s archive to review all our past issues and try to put together a history of the magazine for the past 30 years. I checked the shape, format, writing style, number of publications, and who was in charge of the publication at different times.

RT: Great, will you take me through the chronology of *Peyk*'s development based on your research?

AS: Sure. In October 1991, the first issue was put together and published by Reza Khabazian, as he mentioned. The newsletter was a two-sided sheet of paper, 14 by 8 ½ inches. The same format continued monthly for about 8 months, all in Persian. Then, for Is-



sues 9 to 16, the responsibility was transferred to Shahri Estakhri. Starting with Issue 17, in April 1993, the responsibility was given to Dr. Hossein Motlagh. It was then that the format changed to four pages of 8 ½ by 11-inch paper, and “Khabarnameh” (Newsletter) was renamed “Maahnameh” (Monthly). From Issue 31 in June 1994 to Issue 36 in May 1995, I was responsible for the publication with the same format.

Starting with Issue 37, in August 1995, the name went back to “Khabarnameh Kanoon Farhangi Iranian,” or the newsletter of Persian Cultural Center, and became bilingual and bimonthly, under the responsibility of Shahri Estakhri, Reza Khabazian, and Rahim Mohammady. In March 1996 (Issue 43), the number of pages increased to 8 and then it went to 12 pages, with circulation increasing to 2,000 copies. I was directly or indirectly involved with the process.

Gradually, the number of contributing writers increased, as did the number of advertisements and naturally the number of pages. This continued to Issue 79 (May-June 2002). At this time, the “Khabarnameh” was 32 pages long and was being set up and printed in New Jersey by a professional company and then sent to us for distribution. In June 2002, the helm was given to me by PCC’s board of directors for only two issues, until we could find a replacement. Here we are nineteen years later.

RT: *That’s a long search for a replacement! (laughs) How has Peyk grown since you took over?*

AS: As I mentioned, I wasn’t a stranger to the newsletter and had been cooperating with the team for several years at that point. At the time, the circulation was about 3,000 and we had a good group of writers, such as Zohreh Ghahremani, Mercedeh Mehtash, and Medi Moein, to name a few. The company that was providing the technical support was no longer available and I had to put together a team for typing and design and printing of the magazine. The first issue was a disaster. Then things were just very difficult until we got the hang of it and learned the ropes. Ideen Sadr, Vahid Alavi, and finally Saeed Jalali were instrumental through this transition. We aggressively went after advertisers to help to support these changes.

But we were at a crossroads. Either stay the same or become a professional cultural magazine. For me, there wasn’t a choice. We had to grow. We couldn’t make those changes as a “newsletter.” I suggested to PCC’s board of directors that we rename the magazine *Peyk* (meaning the messenger). They agreed and, starting with Issue 84 (March-April 2003), the name *Peyk* was adopted. The number of writers, both in the English and Persian sides, increased. From Issue 88 (Nov-Dec 2003), Saeed Jalali became the exclusive designer of *Peyk*. At this time, we only could afford color for covers, but gradually added more color ads inside until Issue 100 (Nov-Dec 2005), which was fully colored. Circulation increased to 6,000.

RT: *So much growth in those years! What else has Peyk achieved?*

AS: *Peyk* has become perhaps the only Iranian American cultural magazine in the region, if not the country. As you know, we at the editorial board are constantly looking for good writers to bring different and new points of view to the magazine. Most of our writers have their own columns, and the variety of articles are amazing. All of our articles are original; *Peyk* rarely reprints previously published articles. We value our educational role.

Not only is *Peyk* directly mailed to our members and subscribers, but it is also distributed at Iranian American centers, libraries, Iranian businesses, and Persian schools locally and in other parts of the country.

Time has changed and a lot of people get their information and reading material from the internet, either on their computers and tablets or via their smartphones. We had to comply as well. We launched *Peyk* online in July 2019. All articles are now posted there and readers can leave comments for the writers. This has been our latest achievement. Our archive is also available digitally on PCC’s website.

RT: *You mentioned PCC. What is Peyk’s relationship with the Persian Cultural Center these days and how is Peyk run?*

AS: *Peyk* belongs to PCC and fulfills part of PCC’s cultural and educational activities. The PCC board of directors selects the editor-in-chief; I was given this responsibility in 2002 and I am also managing director of *Peyk*. In that role, I present a report about *Peyk* at every PCC board meeting and I also submit an annual report for the general assembly of PCC. *Peyk* has an editorial board whose members are in charge of gathering materials and choosing, editing, and proofreading selected articles. We have regular meetings before preparing each issue.

RT: *Yes, our editorial board meetings have become good opportunities to brainstorm themes for each issue and focus on areas of interest and education for our readers. Speaking of our readers, Peyk is distributed free of charge. Where does Peyk’s budget come from?*

AS: All writers and editors volunteer their services. The bulk of

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our expenses come from printing, mailing, and distribution. A large portion of our income comes from ads. We limit how many ads we place in *Peyk*—this is a limitation we have imposed on ourselves because we do not want to make the magazine look like junk mail, plus the advertisements can attract the attention they deserve. The balance of *Peyk*'s budget comes from membership fees and grants. PCC receives a grant from The City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture and, this year, *Peyk* received a grant from the Persian Heritage Foundation.

We are grateful for the support of PCC members, *Peyk* subscribers, businesses, advertisers, and grant providers for their support. Without their support, *Peyk* would not exist.

RT: *Has Peyk been recognized outside of the Iranian American community?*

AS: Yes, *Peyk* is one of the manifestations of the Iranian immigrants in this country. It shows how the first generation of immigrants struggled to establish themselves in the new homeland and trail-blazed for future generations. This is part of our history.

Peyk has been registered with the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, and an archive of the magazine's issues is being kept there. In addition, I understand several universities that study Iran and immigrants are collecting *Peyk*. We do have non-Iranian subscribers, too. Receiving the grants we have indicates that *Peyk* is recognized as having a positive cultural impact.

RT: *What are your proudest achievements at Peyk? Any favorite contributions or articles?*

AS: It is really hard to say. I think the entirety of *Peyk* is one of my proudest achievements. Every issue of *Peyk* is. *Peyk* has created a venue and a platform for me and other writers to communicate with our community. My proudest moments are when I see our young writers use this platform for their voices. Aria Fani started with *Peyk* when he was still a teenager. Now he is a professor of Iranian Studies at the University of Washington and still writes for *Peyk*. As a matter of fact, he has become one of the pillars of *Peyk*. Doesn't that make you proud? We have had or have other young writers—Leily Rezvani, Marriam Zarrabi, and Lily Mojdehi, to name just a few. They all make me proud.

Peyk's Future: The Hope to Continue for Another 30 Years and Beyond

RT: *Thank you so much to all three of you for your time looking back at Peyk's origin and its ever-evolving existence. As we wrap up this retrospective, I'd like to know each of your hopes for Peyk as it continues in the future.*

RK: We live in an era in which social media dictates the ultimate rules—we need to follow its desire. The organizers of all cultural magazines, like *Peyk*, can fight as long as this generation is well and alive and willing to publish hard copies, but eventually having them fully online is the remedy. I believe the sooner we get on this train, the better off *Peyk* will be.

SE: Today, *Peyk* has established itself as a front runner for our community. It is online and accessible throughout the world. We have a rich cultural past, thousands of years of culture and history, and great contributions to the world. We lack great representation of who we are and the respect we deserve. *Peyk*'s volunteer editorial board and contributors are all passionate about adding to our readers' daily lives—to learn, to appreciate, to respect, and to reach out to conquer our differences.

I know how hard it is to produce each issue. I know what Ali Sadr and Saeed Jalali and our team working on *Peyk* go through until an issue hits the stands or is delivered. I know what you, Rachel, and Shaghayegh go through in lining us all up to make sure we are doing the best possible work, and I'm deeply grateful to all for the love and passion that you show in having *Peyk* represent us.

I hope *Peyk* will always be the voice of truth, encouragement, and representation for our community. I am so proud to have been part of this team for these past 30 years. Here is to many more 30s under caring leadership!

AS: My hope is for sustainability. We've come a long way. This has been a joyful evolution. From a single-page newsletter to a well-established magazine. Our editorial board and all our contributing writers are volunteering their time to *Peyk* and share this joy. The only weakness of *Peyk* is that it is published every other month. At a time that we are constantly flooded with information and misinformation, it is hard to stay relevant. The only tool we have is the quality of our materials, sincerity, and honesty. We belong to the community. We are serving this community. We don't have any hidden agenda. We at the editorial board love to do this. Financial matters are a different story. *Peyk* is online and has a presence on social media to serve our younger audience and computer savvy readers. But we still have many loyal readers who prefer the printed version, plus many of our advertisers prefer printed ads. We are grateful to the businesses who support us by advertising in *Peyk*, but advertising income barely covers half of our expenses, which is mainly ever-increasing printing and mailing costs. Membership fees and grants fill the gap and—so far—have made the publication possible. To become financially sustainable, we need more advertising revenue; our readers can help by supporting the businesses that support *Peyk*.

This is what I envision for the near future. One thing we all learned from this pandemic is unpredictability. And one thing we learned about ourselves is adaptability. As long as the Iranian American community wants us, we will continue our service.

About *Peyk*:

The following are messages we received from our readers and supporters for *Peyk*'s 30th anniversary. Some of these messages are in Persian and are presented in the Persian section.

Congratulations to *Peyk* for reaching such a significant milestone! Thirty years of uninterrupted publication for a community magazine is nothing less than remarkable. This “little magazine” is a beautiful testament to our community’s spirit of civic engagement and volunteerism. I began writing in these pages when I was eighteen years old. Then, I was searching for my professional path in life. *Peyk* gave me an outlet with which to understand and critique the world around me. Over the past seventeen years, I have changed quite a lot. But that core sentiment has never changed. I entered graduate school in 2012 and became a professor in 2019, during which time my generation has only become more cynical about political prospects for bold and progressive change necessary to address looming climate barbarism, racism, militarism, and ever-widening economic disparity. There have been many moments when I have asked myself, “What will you do in this world with a PhD in Near Eastern Studies?” Writing for *Peyk* has kept me moored to my most fundamental belief that we are on this warming planet to make meaning. I have used *Peyk* as a platform to teach readers about Persian poetry as a verbal and cultural art form, as opposed to a performative symbol of our national identity. I have pushed against some of the toxic and bigoted aspects of Iranian nationalism and tried to show its more inclusive and compassionate potentials. I applied the same critique to the myths of our adopted homeland by holding a mirror of its aspirational self to its current one. All of this to say: *Peyk* has been my home. It has nurtured and challenged me. Its writers and readers have championed and mentored me. So on this occasion, writing with a heart full of gratitude and joy, I join you in congratulating *Peyk* for its thirty-year anniversary and wish it another thirty years of success and growth.

Aria Fani, PhD

Assistant Professor of Persian and Iranian Studies
University of Washington, Seattle

For the past two decades, I have been an avid reader of *Peyk*, PCC’s bilingual magazine. I appreciate the depth and breadth of the articles, ranging from health/nutrition to socio-political analysis as well as the news on social events sponsored by various organizations. I have utmost admiration for the editorial board and the contributing writers, all of whom generously give their time and share their knowledge with our community. THANK YOU!

Haida Mojdehi



Peyk at 30—an amazing accomplishment and a great cause for celebration! I find the Persian Cultural Center of San Diego to be one of the most successful cultural organizations of the Iranian diaspora. The depth and breadth of PCC’s activities and events, and the quality of the communities it has developed, are truly admirable. The success is the result of selfless dedication of a handful of individuals who established the excellent principles of the organization in its infancy, resulting in the continual devotion and commitments of many community member volunteers. *Peyk* has been an indispensable and instrumental communication and documentation tool for PCC and the community at large. The production, quality, and the depth of the content over the past thirty years have shown that the endeavor could reach this point only through the labor of love. Articles range from artistic and literary pieces to critical social and political commentary with a commitment to principles of journalism and aesthetic excellence. Today our homeland of Iran is in a dire state, and communication among those who care for her is possibly the most important aspect in finding a path forward. This communication needs to happen without any bias, neither political nor religious. Cultural work goes beyond all biases. The publication of *Peyk* has become possible by the hard work of many dedicated volunteers who understand the value of culture, and I am deeply thankful to all of them.

Shahrokh Yadegari, PhD

Professor, Music Department
Associate Director, Qualcomm Institute
Director, Sonic Arts R&D and IDEAS, QI
University of California, San Diego

Peyk is a great magazine with a bunch of great information and news. It has influential articles about our health and how to take care of ourselves, including stuff about our rights and what Iranians have a right to. You can learn a lot from the factual information written in the different sections. It's nice that there is both an English side and a Farsi side benefiting everyone. There are pictures with news from the Persian community of San Diego keeping the readers informed of the stuff going on around the community. The magazine can keep you occupied for a while with the variety of ads, health information, and community updates. The magazine is a great way of advertisement and at the same way being informative in many different aspects.

Mehrnaz Yazdani Biuki

I enjoy reading *Peyk* because of the consistent high quality and relevance of its content. Contributors such as Shay Hanson aren't afraid to discuss controversial issues and pose difficult questions. I also appreciate the excellent articles on health, with their sound, practical advice. Keep up the good work!

Mary Hanson

A community relies on how its members self-reflect on their past and present conditions and, more importantly, how such self-reflections are articulated to shape the community for a better future. For thirty years, *Peyk* has served as a forum of discussion and debate with a variety of content that has carved out an inclusive space of self-reflection for the Iranian American community in San Diego. The role of the bilingual magazine has ranged from addressing major social and political issues pertinent to Iranians in the United States to topics related to Persian culture, literature, and history. Each issue provides not just informed articles and local news, but also a venue for diverse points of view across age, class, ethnicity, and religion. *Peyk* is a microcosm of an ideal Iran: open, diverse, and always in the process of becoming better. I wish the journal another thirty years of success.

Babak Rahimi, PhD

Director of the Program for the Study of Religion
and Global South Studies,

Book Review Editor, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*,
Associate Professor of Communication, Culture and Religious
Studies

Program for the Study of Religion,

Department of Literature, UC San Diego

I have been a *Peyk* reader for a long time, perhaps from the beginning. I find it educational, entertaining, and a medium to learn about our community. We all get our news from many sources, but *Peyk* gives us the analysis and nuances that we do not get from the news. You can find literary, medical, and political articles in every issue by *Peyk's* very capable writers, most of whom I know and respect. I would like to congratulate all who work to make it happen on this great milestone.

Sina Emami

In the era of prevailing misinformation and biased articles and media, I look forward to receiving and reading *Peyk* magazine. The articles vary from entertaining to informative and many in between. Despite the limited time I have, I truly enjoy reading articles written by Reza Khabazian. Other interesting articles are book and film reviews, poems, current events (Habil and Ghabil), the *An Immigrant Story* series (which truly resonates with our experience and similar stories), as well as the articles on nutrition, medicine, and history, etc. It is refreshing to see well-balanced and objective articles and, more importantly, many informative articles include references.

Considering the limited resources that PCC has, I congratulate all the contributors, those who work behind the scenes, and the PCC management for producing such a high quality bilingual magazine for such a long time. Kudos to you all; job well done. May you all celebrate the 60th anniversary.

B. John Safaie, PhD, Broker, Senior Mortgage Banker

As a long-time member of PCC, *Peyk* has always had a special place in my heart. I vividly recall the early days before it was called *Peyk*, when it was a simple newsletter folded and stapled together (I remember stapling some of them myself). Of course, *Peyk* has grown to become a highly professional journal with a great deal of rich content in both English and Persian. There are always a few issues of *Peyk* on our coffee table and we always look forward to receiving the new issue. I personally enjoy the news of our community as well as various literary and historical articles. In the most recent issue, I particularly enjoyed Aria Fani's article regarding his trip to Israel and Palestine and I loved Reza Khabazian's article "Jesus and the Super Bowl."

Many congratulations on the 30th anniversary of *Peyk*. Well done and keep up the incredible work.

Kourosh Mehrayin

Once we become immigrants in another nation, then the realization of finding other immigrants from our homeland and cultural similarities becomes a necessity. For us in San Diego, we have been fortunate to find such a wonderful community, as well as familiar cultural possibilities to share. *Peyk* has been instrumental in bringing us together to be a full community, with the opportunity to share our cultural heritage in many ways. It has been my privilege to be part of the editorial board of *Peyk* for the past 30 years and I have learned and enjoyed greatly during all of these past years through *Peyk*. Congratulations to all.

Shahri Estakhry

During my 40+ years in San Diego, *Peyk* has been the single most consistent uniting force in our growing community. I have been involved with and seen many Iranian American groups come and go, but none was able to produce or publish a regular account of who we are, what we care about, and what we hope to achieve in our community other than *Peyk*.

Peyk can tell our story better than anything we have in English and Persian with editorial integrity, nonpartisan perspective, and insightful articles. *Peyk* is an irreplaceable regional asset that ensures we can preserve our community's identity, language, and culture for future generations. If we do nothing else for our community, we should support *Peyk* so it can keep telling our unique Iranian American story, as only it can.

Shahriar Afshar
Afshar Group, Principal
Podcast Host & Founder

I have lived in San Diego for 33 years and I congratulate Mr. Ali Sadr, Ms. Shahri Estakhry, and *Peyk*'s high caliber team for the tremendous improvements that *Peyk* has made in its lifetime of 30 years. By that, I mean improvement in quality of content, presentation, variety of subjects, and timeliness even with financial constraints. I am grateful that, despite some earlier objections by a few PCC leaders, *Peyk* is now covering critical issues of our times such as politics, the environmental crisis, and racial, economic, legal, and social disparities.

As Iranian Americans, we have a vital civic responsibility to be informed citizens and vote. Politics affect all aspects of our lives every day. We need to be informed on political issues at local, state, and federal levels.

Morteza Rahimi

I look forward to receiving *Peyk* because it gives me a perspective that I don't find anywhere else. For years, my favorite column has been written by Shahri Estakhry because her outlook is always positive and thoughtful with an emphasis on making our world a kinder, more equitable place. From medical advice to education topics to articles about Persian arts and culture to mouth-watering recipes, *Peyk* has something for everyone. No wonder it's been going strong for thirty years!

Mary [last name withheld by author]

Peyk Magazine has been a much valued part of the cultural life of the Iranian American community in San Diego. Its inclusion of a wide range of engaging and informative material, its elegantly designed bilingual format in English and Persian, as well as its consistently regular publication, dedicated editorial hard work, and continued community support have made it an integral part of the community's cultural life over the years.

Ali Gheissari, PhD
University of San Diego
Persian Heritage Foundation

I want to congratulate you and the other dedicated leaders on the thirtieth anniversary of Persian Cultural Center's *Peyk* magazine. When I was visiting Florida a couple of years ago, I showed the magazine to a group of my old Iranian friends and they were astonished to see the magazine and informa-

tion about the organization. By the way, my favorite sections are editorial,
Wishing you the best and more success.

Iraj Varzi, MD

I started teaching at the Iranian School of San Diego when it first started in 1988. I received the first issue of *Peyk* thirty years ago and have received and kept every issue since then. It is beautiful how *Peyk* and the Iranian American community of San Diego have evolved and changed over the past three decades. It has always been informative and a source of pride for our community. Students, parents, grandparents, and all members of our community learn about various topics in each issue. As a teacher, I am thankful to *Peyk* for always covering news about the Iranian school and educational matters. I wish *Peyk* an even greater success in the next 30 years.

Elahah Shoushtari

While I didn't grow up in San Diego, the Persian Cultural Center (PCC) and *Peyk* have been part of my life since my parents moved here in 1990. My parents' involvement in the community was a big part of my introduction to *Peyk*, as I was off to college on the east coast the year they moved. Yet thanks to them, my siblings and I received issues of the magazine over the years no matter where we were based. We appreciated the wide range of topics covered in the periodical, but were even more moved by the way *Peyk* managed to collect stories and information by and about brilliant, inspiring, ordinary and yet extraordinary fellow Iranians and deliver these to an impressively wide audience.

Over the years, I became more engaged with *Peyk* as I pursued a career in the arts with a specialization in Iran. In 2008, encouraged by Mrs. Shahri Estakhry, I contributed a piece on the debated term "Islamic art" in response to an article I'd read in the previous issue, feeling compelled to share my views based on experience in the field as a museum curator and academic. This marked a transition from a more passive or peripheral relationship with the magazine to a more active one with both *Peyk* and PCC, and a growing sense of responsibility to take part in my community as an Iranian American adult. The relationship has grown to include ISSD since moving to San Diego in 2019 with my two children, both of whom are now benefiting from their Persian language classes, and I get to share news about curating the arts of Iran, South Asia, and the Islamic world at The San Diego Museum of Art. I am proud to do this for a magazine that continues to bring a wealth of information and entertainment to the Iranian community and beyond, and I respect its editors for their efforts to provide us with different views on important issues. What an honor to be able to celebrate 30 years of *Peyk* and the tireless efforts of the *Peyk* family!

Ladan Akbarnia, PhD
Curator, South Asian and Islamic Art
The San Diego Museum of Art



by Hooshyar Afsar



Intersectionality and Our Community

In the past year, the debate around intersectionality as a major pillar of Critical Race Theory has heated up in the United States. While it has been adopted by many activists of racial and social justice movements, it has also been used by white nationalists and Trump supporters to attack those movements as “unpatriotic” and “un-American.” Many politicians and legislatures have gone as far as removing it from the curriculums of school districts in their jurisdictions. In this piece, I intend to cover this topic and consider the relevance of intersectionality to the Iranian American community.

What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a framework by which various aspects of a person’s or group’s identity are considered as interconnected and overlapping rather than in prioritized and/or isolated fashion. These aspects include—and are not limited to—race, gender, caste, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and citizenship (immigration status). Intersectionality also looks at how these aspects are used to keep discrimination and systems of privilege in place. One could argue that we cannot fully analyze and understand how systemic racism continues to stay in place in the U.S. without understanding intersectionality. For example, how intersectionality is denied and/or rejected in the U.S. judicial process is a major aspect of keeping systemic racism and patriarchy intact. I shall attempt to explain this better by using examples and analogies before I talk about its relevance to the Iranian American community. Let’s start with a historical perspective.

Intersectionality: Historical Advocates

Long before intersectionality was coined as an academic term in the late 20th century by UCLA and Columbia University law professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, it was used in action by Black feminists of the 19th century.

The most well known example is Sojourner Truth’s famous impromptu speech at a women’s rights conference in Akron Ohio in 1851. Six feet tall and a strong formerly enslaved woman, Truth stood up in the middle of the conference and challenged both racism and patriarchy by declaring: “Ain’t I a woman.” Many white women wanted her silenced because they thought her speech took attention away from the women’s suffrage movement. At the same time, most men who ridiculed women as weak did not like her speech because she clearly exposed their lie. Truth lived intersectionality in action; she saw women’s rights as inseparable from the struggle to abolish slavery. Without using today’s terminology, she saw gender equality as an integral part of bringing freedom and equality to formerly enslaved people after the abolition of slavery.

Truth’s story is truly remarkable. It is short of unbelievable that after she gained her freedom she fought and won in Alabama courts in 1828 to be reunited with her son who had been sold into slavery. She campaigned for land grants to the formerly enslaved after the end of the Civil War and even met with President Lincoln to forward her case because she understood economic justice as a major part of attaining racial justice for Black people. During one of her speeches in 1858 in Indiana, when facing male hecklers who claimed she was a man, she exposed her breasts to prove her case. As her biographer Nell Irvin Painter wrote, “At a time when most Americans thought of slaves as male and women as white, Truth embodied a fact that still bears repeating: Among the blacks are women; among the women, there are blacks.” She went far beyond breaking that stereotype in the minds

of white people. Truth lived and breathed intersectionality over 130 years before it became an academic framework and over 150 years before racial justice activists began to adopt it as a cornerstone of the movement.

Of course, Truth was not the only Black feminist of the 19th century who understood intersectionality in action. Anna Julia Cooper—who was born into slavery, became the fourth Black woman to earn a PhD, and is recognized by many as the first Black Feminist—criticized many Black leaders who did not speak for Black women while claiming to speak for the race, noting that “Only the Black Woman can say, when and where I enter ... then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.” Among other prominent Black women racial justice activists of the 19th and early 20th centuries who demonstrated their commitment to intersectionality in action was Ida B. Wells. Born into slavery, Wells later became a prominent anti-lynching activist reporter, the only Black woman founder of NAACP, and a leading Black suffragist. Wells confronted the racism of white women suffragists and understood the key role of Black women in achieving gender equality.

Professor Crenshaw’s Landmark 1989 Paper Analyzing Intersectionality

While in many branches of science a scientific theory could emerge before there is experimental evidence to prove it, in the realm of social sciences there are many occasions when a theory emerges after there are social movements and/or other phenomena that require its creation. This doesn’t take anything away from the importance of theory and academic work. In fact, such work gives more credibility to the movement and could help guide it more effectively.

In the 1970s and 1980s, after it became clear that the Civil Rights Movement had not accomplished its fundamental racial justice objectives and many of its gains were being overturned (a process that even continues today), many activists and academicians became interested in devising new theories to critically examine race, racism, white supremacy, and the racial justice movement. A key part of this endeavor happened at Harvard Law School, where Black law students in opposition to the policies of the school administration started the “Critical Race Theory Workshop.” One of the founders of this workshop was Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw.

Later in 1989, while teaching at the UCLA School of Law, Professor Crenshaw wrote a landmark paper in the *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (aka *Chicago Unbound*). In this paper, she analyzed three anti-discrimination lawsuits brought by Black women and showed how the court system uses singularity of racial discrimination against Black men and sexism against white women to erase discrimination against Black women. The court argued that Black women are not a “new class of protected minorities” and ruling in their favor would open a “Pandora’s box” of “new classes of protected minorities.” In other words, Black women could only argue that they were racially discriminated against if they made a case of their Blackness or argue that they were the target of sexism if they made a case of their womanhood, but they could not make a case that they were target of discrimination as “Black Women.”

Professor Crenshaw revealed that this singular and prioritized way of dealing with racism and patriarchy was not limited to courts—the anti-racist and feminist movements were also dominated by it. She showed that the definition of discrimination assumes discrimination against all members of a group in the same manner, and argued that this definition not only misses the variations and experiences of subgroups within the larger group, but also fails to challenge the perceived notions of race, gender, and class domination and helps keep them in place. In a sense,

the intersectionality of white supremacy, patriarchy, and economic class hierarchy keeps them in place by denying the intersectionality of race, gender and class of the affected population. She wrote: **“According to the dominant view, a discriminator treats all people within a race or sex category similarly ... Consequently, one generally cannot combine these categories. Race and sex, moreover, become significant only when they operate to explicitly disadvantage the victims; because the privileging of whiteness or maleness is implicit, it is generally not perceived at all.”**

To elucidate her analysis, Professor Crenshaw used a “traffic at an intersection” analogy, writing: “Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.” Professor Crenshaw then argued that our legal system and even the anti-racist and feminist movements are like an ambulance that shows up and fails to treat a victim of the accident in the intersection because it is not clear which line of traffic caused the accident! She further elaborated that this also results in erasure, because when a certain subgroup doesn’t fit the mold, then it is ignored as if it doesn’t exist. One could say intersectional erasure is the ultimate form of marginalization.

Depolying vivid imagery, Professor Crenshaw further shed light on this complex legal and social phenomenon that is essential to systemic racism: “Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked-feet standing on shoulders with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are not disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that ‘but for’ the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who—due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below—are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch. As this analogy translates for Black women, the problem is that they can receive protection only to the extent that their experiences are recognizably similar to those whose experiences tend to be reflected in antidiscrimination doctrine. If Black women cannot conclusively say that ‘but for’ their race or ‘but for’ their gender they would be treated differently, they are not invited to climb through the hatch but told to wait in the unprotected margin until they can be absorbed into the broader, protected categories of race and sex.”

Professor Crenshaw wrote: “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating ‘women’s experience’ or ‘the Black experience’ into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast.” She uses Black women as examples because they are the most marginalized to make us understand the problem. One could replace Black women with immigrant women or immigrant transgender people of color and so on to make the case that we can not really address fundamental problems of U.S. society in particular and human society in general without having an intersectional view of human groups, their movements, impediments to justice, and potential solutions.

Why Is Intersectionality Important to Our Community?

When we think about our Iranian American community or the Iranian community globally—including Iran itself—we are anything but a homogenous group. Unlike what some politicians have comically claimed in the past, our community, like other human communities, is the intersection of many subgroups. One could make a solid argument that Iranian women are heavily marginalized inside Iran by the patriarchal political and social structures of the theocracy in place and they are also, to a lesser degree, marginalized by the culture of patriarchy in our communities outside Iran. While systemic racism and marginalization of Black women in the U.S. is of a distinct character, further marginalization of Iranian women based on race and colorism, ethnicity, and class is a reality for our communities inside and outside Iran. Could one then argue along the same lines that when Iranian women enter, we all enter?

How about the Iranian American community? Are we really as homogenous as stereotypes tell us? Are we all highly educated and economically successful and drive black Mercedes and BMWs? Reality tells us otherwise. In fact and to a great extent, we are similarly diverse and valuing intersectionality will only empower us to come together and celebrate our diversity. On the other hand, denial of intersectionality will only add to division and lack of unity across our communities.

Denial of intersectionality in the Iranian community takes various forms. While public denial of the existence of an LGBTQ community in Iran by politicians may be comical, there is a very strong tendency in the Iranian American community to use the myth of “Aryan race” in order to “pass as white.” In fact, many in our community would like to be considered white and they think it helps their social standing. In past articles on this subject in *Peyk*, I have made scientific and historical arguments that whiteness and white supremacy were invented by Europeans during the time of enlightenment and are a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of human society. In fact, race is a social construct invented for economic, social, and political gain/domination. “Passing as white” completely misses the boat of social justice and helps keep white supremacy and patriarchy in place. It is the most overt form of denial of intersectionality in our communities and robs us of our unity and solidarity with other marginalized communities.

Many of us may read Professor Crenshaw’s analogy of a stack of humans of different race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, immigration status, and ability and think as “homogenous” Iranians we are very close to the top of the stack and could somehow crawl through the ceiling hatch on to the first floor above. But what if there are limitless possibilities if we strive to embrace intersectionality and eliminate the human stack and multiple floors in the first place? What if we stand in solidarity with communities of color who have paved the way for our rights as immigrants? What if we all belong and are related as humans when we embrace intersectionality?

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Hooshyar Afsar is one of the founders of Racism Awareness Project (RAP), an educational program on history of and present-day racism in the United States and its impact on Iranian American Community. RAP has had a variety of educational forums across the United States. Mr. Afsar has written several articles and book reviews on the topic for Peyk and other publications. He can be reached at hoosh.afsar@rapusa.org.

A Cross-Cultural Encounter: The 1958 World Cup Final

By Danial Golphorush

Almost every international match-up—regardless of the reason, the genre, or the outcome—is a cross-cultural encounter, from the knowledge and goods traded on the Silk Road to the negotiation table at the United Nations or even a soccer game.

A memorable clash between two dominant teams is often expected from a World Cup final, but in many ways, the 1958 World Cup final went beyond such desires and expectations. While this game was crucial in the world of football and the power shift it caused from Europe to the Americas, the clash between the teams displayed a greater cultural exchange between the two countries. Although “culture” can be defined in multiple ways, there is a clear distinction made by the writers and announcers of the time about the methods used by each team in the game. Culture and gameplay originate and can be affected by a variety of factors in a country and her experience, but it is often transmitted by the culture of the nation, which itself is based on factors such as ideologies, religion, physical geography, etc.

In the case of the 1958 World Cup Final, Sweden’s burgeoning industrialization and the lack of it in Brazil appeared to be transmitted to their culture and, as a result, to the style of their football play. While Sweden’s method was more functionalist, direct, and formulated, the Brazil National Team’s tactics were more composed of individual effort and creative use of space available, styles that continue to this day. Here is to one of the most iconic and over-discussed matches in the history of the beautiful game.

Swedish Functionalism: From Economics to Soccer Style

In the 1930s, the rise of a contemporary view on architectural and urban planning, mass industrialization, and the rise of functionalism triggered a new social construction in Sweden. The Stockholm Exhibition, an art and innovation expo held in Sweden in 1930, provided a platform for functionalism to take off by questioning the older urban construction designs and development in Sweden and Scandinavia. In architecture, functionalism is the belief that a building must be designed and built based on its purpose and nothing more. The reason behind the success of functionalism in Sweden is tied to its delayed but rapid industrialization, which demanded phases of quick adaptation by the society over the next few years to an industrial society, thus establishing a path for “industry [to provide] the model for the social visions of the architects and planners.” (1)

Industrialization, being the main source of the functionalist architectural views, also influenced societal beliefs; it was thought that “society can be broken down into a number of basic functions, and that these can then serve as the foundation for planned action.” (1) On account of the constant efficiency demanded by industrialization, factories, and machinery, features of society that do not hold any indispensable function are eliminated. On the other hand, func-

tionism promotes national and communal identity. In *Function and Functionalism: A Synthetic Perspective*, authors Martin Mahner and Mario Bunge analyze Swedish social functions and functionalism, identifying the elimination of unpurposeful factors: “For example, fertility rites and other ceremonies may persist in industrial societies because they have some latent collateral function, such as reinforcing group ‘identity’ and thus social cohesion.” (2)

As a result of such social and urban development, the industrialization of the state carries a deeper meaning for the Swedish society, consequently creating a formulated and mechanical culture of approach to their endeavors, which carried over into other cultural elements, such as Swedish football. The functionalist ideology encouraged by industrialization was extremely evident in the culture and style of Swedish football. The ever-shifting formation of the Swedish team (during each match) is essential to understanding Swedish culture—movements are formulaic and each team member needs to perform different tasks as the tactical needs in the game changes in order for the bigger tactics to work like a well-oiled machine.

Argentine journalist Tomás Mazzoni, writing in 1949, described the Swedish/European style of soccer as, “The Englishman considers a player that dribbles three times in succession is a nuisance,” indicating their rigid and direct approach to the game. (3) He continues by stating, “English football, well-played, is like a symphonic orchestra;” repeatedly the style of play is remarkably orchestrated and formulated, highlighting its resemblance to machinery and functions that each part has. (3) One may even go so far as analyzing the match as a game of connecting the dots, in which each team member utilizes the ball as a way to connect to the other as precisely as possible. As discussed earlier, a functionalist culture and mindset became deeply rooted in Swedish society after the rapid industrialization, eventually making its way to the football pitch.

Brazilian Flair: Resourcefulness at Home and on the Pitch

Simultaneously, in Brazil, the rise of favelas (slums) located near Rio de Janeiro caused by lack of industrialization and economic opportunities have formed a culture of creative assortment and allocation of resources. In the late 19th century, Providencia, a highly populated area, consisted of closely-compacted and informal housing units assembled by loose or damaged materials. The first squatter settlements were built for the veterans of the Canudos War, but the squatter settlements grew in the early 20th century when many were forced to create their own housing after failing to acquire shelter and a job in the city.

Brian Godfrey, in *Revisiting Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo*, explains that “favelas first emerged as a result of turn-of-the-century urban renewal in the CBD (Central Business District) and thereaf-

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ter steadily mushroomed around the city.” (4) Due to such circumstances and the need for money, the favelados provided “cheap labor for odd jobs and informal commerce in the modernizing Brazilian city.” (4) Such rapid rural-urban migration, inspired by industrial development and a lack of consistent employment availability, led to a reliance on “central slums as the main form of housing for the urban poor.” (4) Much like the industrialization in Sweden, the mass movements to the slums forced the community to adapt, resulting in creativity and adaptability becoming ingrained in the social and cultural aspect of the favelas over generations.

Living in such impoverished lifestyles led to the creative use of material and space with scarcely any resources available, which, like the transference of functionalist culture in Sweden, also emerged in Brazil’s style of football. The Brazilians’ free-flowing and space-conscious movements are visible in the team’s efforts to navigate the ball successfully in the smallest amount of space. In the same writing by the Argentine journalist, Tomás Mazzoni stated that the Brazilian style of soccer was rhythmic and spontaneous, extremely dissimilar to the European approach, as “well-played, Brazilian football is like an extremely hot jazz band,” highlighting its impulsive nature. (3) He finishes by re-emphasizing his point regarding the creativity of the culture by stating: “The English player thinks; the Brazilian improvises.” (3) Such practices are reflective of the favela culture and the adaptation the population had to make because of scarce resources and space.

Two Cultures and Styles Collide

The 1958 World Cup final was a game that is remembered across generations because of the introduction to and cross-cultural encounter of these two countries and their respective methods of play. A flick of the ball over the defender’s head was all it took for Brazil’s Pelé to open space in the rigid and strong Swedish defense and score. The Swedish defender was left in shock as the Brazilians celebrated their goal. This event marked many firsts, including the first final to be played between a European team and a team from Latin America, and the first time a World Cup staged in Europe was not won by a European nation. As John Mulliken wrote in *The Samba No One Could Match*, published on July 7, 1958, in *Sports Illustrated* magazine:

“Over 800,000 paid to watch the games in 12 Swedish towns—somewhat less than expected, because several of the best games were televised over the Eurovision network which covers all Europe. But it was a sellout crowd of 50,000 which poured into Stockholm’s Rasunda Stadium for the Sweden-Brazil final last Sunday. Powder-blue-uniformed police lined the route; the deafening roar which greeted the two elevens when they took the field was indicative of the anticipation with which the soccer world was looking forward to this clash between two teams of

sharply divergent styles. The artistic, dazzling Brazilians, who do not like the hard-tackling type of defense which characterizes European soccer, were expected to be troubled by the vigor of the straight-shooting Swedes.” (5)

The use of terminologies “artistic” and “dazzling” starkly contrast terms like “straight-shooting;” speaking volumes about what took place in this game. Even though the Swedes were expected to win, the Brazilians introduced their own methods of approaching and connecting tactics and techniques. The two teams’ approach to the game were polar opposites; one starting the youngest player to ever score in a World Cup final (Brazil’s Pelé), while the other presented the oldest. The match ended 5-2 in favor of Brazil despite the early lead taken by Sweden. The formation shifts were often repeatedly and abruptly cut short with rainbow flicks, chips, crosses, and trick passes, creating more space for Brazilian open shots to the goal.

As Pelé recalls in one of his interviews:

“When I passed Didi, I made it as if I was going to run forward but turned back instead. That confused the defender a little and he let the ball come through to me. When I controlled it on my chest he thought I was going to shoot. I got my foot on it and flicked it over his head, which was something the Europeans weren’t used to. They always tried to close you down because they were used to people shooting straightaway. I hit the ball before it touched the ground and in it went.”

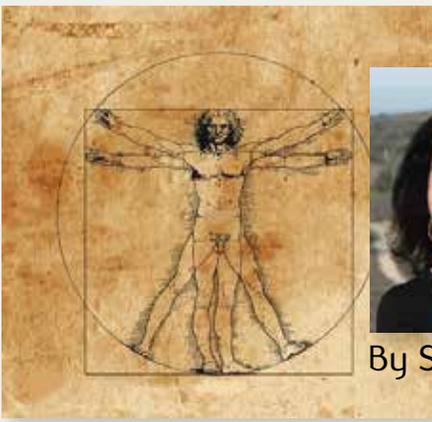
The ever-shifting formation of the Swedish National Team based on the position of the opponent fell short when met with the “dazzling” and “artistic”—in other words, *unique*—approach that the Brazilians had in the game.

Soccer As Revealing of Culture

While it would be false to credit the entirety of a national team’s style of soccer playing to its societal realities—however transformed by cultural values or the existence (or lack thereof) of industrialization—there is no doubt that the complex and unique experiences each national team brings to the table will be demonstrated in and impact its encounters with other national teams. Through time, we not only are influenced by our surroundings, past experience, and resources, but these factors are only part of the web of our complex and interconnected world. Each team brings their own beauties to the field and, at the end of it all, we enjoy the fruits of who we are as we celebrate our differences.

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By Sanaz Majd, MD



Vitamin D: Cure-All or Hype?

The media has glorified vitamin D, often referred to as the “sunshine vitamin,” and labeled it the cure-all for seemingly everything from depression to cancer and everything else under the sun (no pun intended).

Should you get your vitamin D levels checked or is it yet another media over-hype? Let’s review why vitamin D is important, who should get their blood levels tested, and how much is enough.

Why Do We Need Vitamin D?

Ingested vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium from the intestines into the bloodstream and is important for overall bone health. It also suppresses the parathyroid hormone that tends to break down our bones.

Insufficiency of vitamin D can contribute to osteoporosis—low bone density that can increase fracture risk. Fractures in later life, especially of the hip, can significantly impair quality of life and functioning.

What about the claims vitamin D can cure fatigue, depression, cancer, heart disease, etc? There is no good scientific evidence to back them up. Also, note that supplements are not FDA approved, so their safety is not always well-established and their claims often go unsubstantiated. The vitamin industry is quite savvy at marketing itself. So make sure to obtain the facts before you initiate any supplement, and pick your doctor’s brain prior.

What Are the Sources of Vitamin D?

There are two main sources:

YOUR DIET:

If you have watched my YouTube videos, you know that I always say it is best to obtain your nutrients from your diet rather than from a supplement. Dietary sources of vitamin D include fatty fish (such as salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines), egg yolk, mushrooms, fortified cereals, and fortified cow’s milk. You can obtain around 100 International Units (IU) in an 8 oz. cup of milk, while 3 oz. of cooked salmon contains about 570 IUs. If you do not tend to consume these foods regularly, however, it may be a reason for vitamin D insufficiency and supplementation may be indicated.

YOUR SKIN:

Believe it or not, you also produce vitamin D underneath your skin when exposed to sunlight. Hence, why we refer to it as the “sunshine vitamin.”

However, the amount of sunlight necessary to produce sufficient amounts varies with location, season, and time of day. Peak sun rays are often between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. And those who live in the northern latitude, above the imaginary line between Philadelphia and San Francisco, may have a greater challenge obtaining enough UV rays in the winter. Sunscreen may also limit vitamin D production (but that does mean we should forgo protecting ourselves from skin cancer).

Skin production also varies depending on the skin color and age of the person. Those who have darker skin may require more sunlight. Also, age is another factor—as we grow older, our skin production diminishes.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), approximately 5 to 30 minutes of sun exposure either daily or at least twice a week to exposed face, arms, hands, and legs is typically sufficient for most people. But beware before you decide to fry your skin lathered in baby oil, as you do not want to exchange vitamin D for skin cancer, either. And tanning beds are certainly not recommended.

What Are Normal Vitamin D Levels?

One of the challenges of measuring vitamin D levels in the blood is that the expert groups do not agree on what “normal” levels should be—some say a level of 20 should be the threshold and others say 30.

Who Should Be Tested?

Severe vitamin D deficiencies are rare in developed countries like the U.S., but mild insufficiencies are fairly common. Some of the lowest vitamin D levels in the world have been found in people of the Middle East and South Asia, so Iranians are also at risk.

Infants/children and the elderly are two other at-risk groups, along with those who do not consume sufficient dairy products, have medical conditions that diminish the absorption of vitamin D through the gut, or medical conditions that impair vitamin D metabolism.

But, if you are relatively healthy and live in Southern California or other sunny parts of the world, should you even be worried about vitamin D levels since we tend to get more sun exposure? Who should be tested?

Not everyone needs their vitamin D level checked, despite all of the media hype. There is no good evidence that screening younger,

healthy people is even beneficial. Because of this lack of available data, many insurance plans decline to cover the cost of the blood test and it is a very costly test (around several hundred dollars or so out of pocket).

Medical expert groups recommend testing of the following at-risk groups, the top populations that do have evidence to back up these recommendations:

- Elderly people with falls, who are homebound, or living in nursing homes/long-term care facilities
- People with intestinal disorders, such as Crohn's disease and celiac disease, that affect the ability to absorb vitamin D through the gut
- Those who have had surgery to remove any part of the intestines, such as those with gastric bypass operations
- People with kidney or liver disease, organs which help metabolize vitamin D
- Patients with osteoporosis or osteopenia diagnosed on a bone density test

How Much Vitamin D Do We Need?

The typical healthy adult needs about 800 IUs of vitamin D daily (for instance, elderly homebound patients may need more). Therefore, if you are a normal-risk adult, you do not necessarily need your blood levels checked, only to simply maintain this daily intake, whether it is through the diet or a supplement (or both).

Note that vitamin D does have a toxicity level, so do not take excessive amounts. However, up to 2,000 IUs daily have been generally found to be safe.

Supplements are sold in two forms—cholecalciferol (vitamin D3) or ergocalciferol (vitamin D2). D3 is preferred over D2, however, because it is the more naturally-occurring form of the vitamin with improved absorption rates.

In addition to vitamin D, calcium is a key player in bone health. For premenopausal women and men up to age 70, 1,000 mg of daily calcium (in divided doses) is also recommended. The recommendation is slightly higher at 1,200 mg for postmenopausal women and men over age 70. Again, it is best to obtain your nutrients through the diet, and calcium is found in many food sources.

As always, be sure to discuss your health with your doctor before initiating any medication or supplement, as this article is for general informational purposes only.

Wishing you a sun-sational Fall season!

For a video version of this article, check out @MajdMD on YouTube.

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Public Announcement



CONSIDERING PURCHASING A BACKUP POWER SOURCE?

We all rely on electricity for everyday life. That's why it's important to have an emergency plan in place before a power outage occurs. As part of your plan, you may want to consider adding a backup power source like a generator or portable power station.

A backup electric generator can be valuable when the power goes out. Backup electric generators aren't connected to SDG&E's power grid. This means that, in the event of an outage, a backup generator can turn the lights back on, keep appliances running and power essential equipment and electronic devices.

There are two types of generators:

1- **Portable generators** provide temporary power for basic needs. They can range in price from a few hundred dollars to more than \$1,000. It is very important to determine what size generator you'll need and how to operate it safely before running it for the first time.

2- **Permanent standby generators** are bigger and better equipped to power larger structures, such as an entire home, if sized properly. When a power outage occurs, they turn on automatically and turn off when power is restored. These generators require professional installation from a licensed electrician.

For electric generator safety tips, visit sdge.com/generator



Mycotoxins In Foods



By Mohammad Ahrar, PhD

Introduction

Mycotoxins are toxins produced by certain molds that can grow on foods and food products. Some mycotoxins can cause serious health problems and even death in humans, as well as in animals, if ingested in high concentrations. The object of this article is to provide some basic information about fungal toxins in food and ways to avoid them.

The basics

Molds are a type of fungus; they are aerobic (need oxygen to grow) and are found almost everywhere. Fungi (plural of fungus) are so diverse in nature that they have their own category. Except bacteria, all living organisms that consist of true cells come under three main categories known as Kingdoms. Fungi, molds, mushrooms, and yeasts belong to the fungi kingdom. Plants and animals are the other two kingdoms.

Fungi and molds are heterotrophs, which means they depend on other materials to survive. They can use carbon from dead tissues or other sources to produce energy and other chemicals. Fungi release specific enzymes which digest organic matter and absorb nutrients through very thin cell walls. Most molds need minimal moisture to live and can grow in warm temperatures as well as in cold temperatures such as the refrigerator.

How mold enters the food chain

Mold is the most widely encountered microorganism. Mold spores are too small to be seen by the naked eye and can easily be spread by air currents, insects, rodents, pets, wind, and water. When one spore lands on a surface that contains moisture, it can grow rapidly, making many colonies and producing mycotoxin. Mold grows on a variety of crops and food stuffs including cereals, nuts, spices, dried or fresh fruit, coffee beans, bread, cheese, vegetables, starchy foods, jams, grain, corn, peanuts or peanut products, and a wide variety of other products. Toxins from some species of fungi are especially associated with a range of moldy fruits and vegetables, in particular rotting apples and figs. Mycotoxins can enter the food chain due to contaminated crops or during the food handling process and storage. Reports show that up to 25% of the world's grain crops may be contaminated with mycotoxins. The highest levels were found in pistachios and Brazil nuts. Animal products, such as meat, milk, and eggs, can also contain mycotoxins if the animals consume contaminated feed.

Mycotoxin in spices

Studies have shown that spices such as chili pepper, black pepper, and dry ginger are very susceptible to mold contamination. These

spices were found to be the most contaminated spices. Mycotoxins have also been found in medicinal plants and herbal medicines.

Types of mycotoxins

More than 400 mycotoxins have been identified, and many of them can be poisonous in humans. The most important mycotoxins that can cause human and animal illnesses include aflatoxin, citrinin, fusarium toxins, and a few other types. While a type of mold may produce more than one mycotoxin, a mycotoxin can also be synthesized by different types of molds.

Aflatoxin is produced by some *Aspergillus* fungi, notably *Aspergillus flavus*. This species produces different toxins. Aflatoxin B1 is the most toxic mycotoxin and is a potent carcinogen. It has been shown that this toxin is directly correlated to liver cancer in many animal species (1). Aflatoxins are largely associated with foods such as cotton, cotton seed, raw pistachios, raw peanuts and peanut products, corn, and some spices.

Citrinin is a toxin that is produced by different species of *Penicillium* fungus and several species of *Aspergillus*. Studies show that citrinin is associated with kidney disease in many animal species. Citrinin has been found in many human foods including wheat, rice, corn, barley, oats, rye, and some underground food products.

Fusarium toxins are produced by different species of fusarium fungi and have a history of infecting grains such as wheat and corn.

How mycotoxins affect your health

Mycotoxins have the potential for both acute and chronic health effects via ingestion, skin contact, inhalation, or entering the bloodstream and lymphatic system. If mycotoxins are ingested beyond the tolerance level, they can inhibit protein synthesis, damage macrophages (a type of white blood cell of the immune system), cause liver cancer, and prevent clearance of particles in the lungs which can result in lung disease.

The symptoms of mycotoxicosis depend on the type of mycotoxin, the concentration and length of exposure, as well as the age, health, and gender of the exposed individual. Early symptoms include chronic fatigue, rashes, convulsions, and digestive system discomfort, among others. Reports also show that a weak body due to vitamin deficiency, caloric deprivation, excessive alcohol use,



and infectious disease status can all have compounded effects with toxicity of mycotoxins. Aflatoxins, for example, have shown to be genotoxic, meaning they can damage DNA and cause cancer in animal species. There is also evidence that they can cause liver cancer in humans.

Are all fungi poisonous?

Not all molds are poisonous. Some molds are even beneficial. For example, some species of *Penicillium* and *Aspergillus* fungi are used to produce cheese and soy sauce. Mycotoxins produced by some fungi can inhibit the growth of other fungi or even prevent bacteria growth. That is how Alexander Fleming, a Scottish physician-scientist, discovered penicillin in 1928. During a series of experiments involving the common staphylococcal bacteria, Fleming uncovered a Petri dish sitting next to an open window which apparently had become contaminated with mold spores. He observed that the bacteria in proximity to the mold colonies were dying. He identified the mold as a genus of *Penicillium* fungus that produced a special chemical. He discerned that it was not the mold itself but some “juice” (now we know it as mycotoxin) that the mold had produced which had killed the bacteria. In his studies, he found the byproduct of the *Penicillium* species to be effective against all Gram-positive pathogens.

Do mushrooms produce mycotoxin?

Mycotoxin exposure from molds is almost always accidental. But with mushrooms, ingestion of unknown varieties usually causes health problems due to the toxic chemicals. Various wild mushrooms contain an assortment of poisons that cause health problems in humans. Ingestion of misidentified mushrooms containing mycotoxins may result in hallucinations and serious health problems. Some wild mushrooms are responsible for approximately 90% of all mushroom fatalities.

Does cooking destroy mycotoxin?

Most mycotoxins are stable and heat resistant. Reports indicate that it is NOT possible to inactivate all aflatoxin by normal heating. It is difficult to eliminate it completely once it is produced. Mycotoxins cannot be completely destroyed under normal cooking temperatures (100 to 210° C) in one hour. Research shows that after boiling contaminated foods, 50 to 80% of mycotoxins remain in food, with around 10 to 15% found in the rinse water (5). Roasting can reduce the levels of aflatoxins by 50–70% in peanuts and pecans, and can reduce levels by more than 90% in coffee beans (6). Experiments have shown that chemicals such as bleach with 5% sodium hypochlorite kills some molds and their mycotoxins, including aflatoxin. When you find mold on any food, you can expect mycotoxins have been produced which could be above the maximum level of tolerance; so, the only option is to destroy the product.

How to prevent fungal growth on food

When mold grows on foods and mycotoxins are developed, it will be very difficult to remove them. However, the heating process, at which a temperature of at least 140F is reached and a very low humidity (ideally between 30 percent and 50 percent) can stop growth of hyphae of mold and prevent production of mycotoxins.

The key to eliminating mold growth in households is to keep foods in a dry condition and in air-tight containers to eliminate oxygen. Mycotoxins can also be destroyed by the fermentation process; therefore, it is not normally found in apple cider and wine. Molds can grow in foods and fruits kept in refrigeration more than 4 to 5 days.

In the food industry, physical methods used to prevent growth of mycotoxin producing fungi or to remove toxins from contaminated food include temperature and humidity control, irradiation, and photodynamic treatment. These methods are usually applied to some food products before hitting the market and are closely monitored by the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S.

How safe are food products in the market?

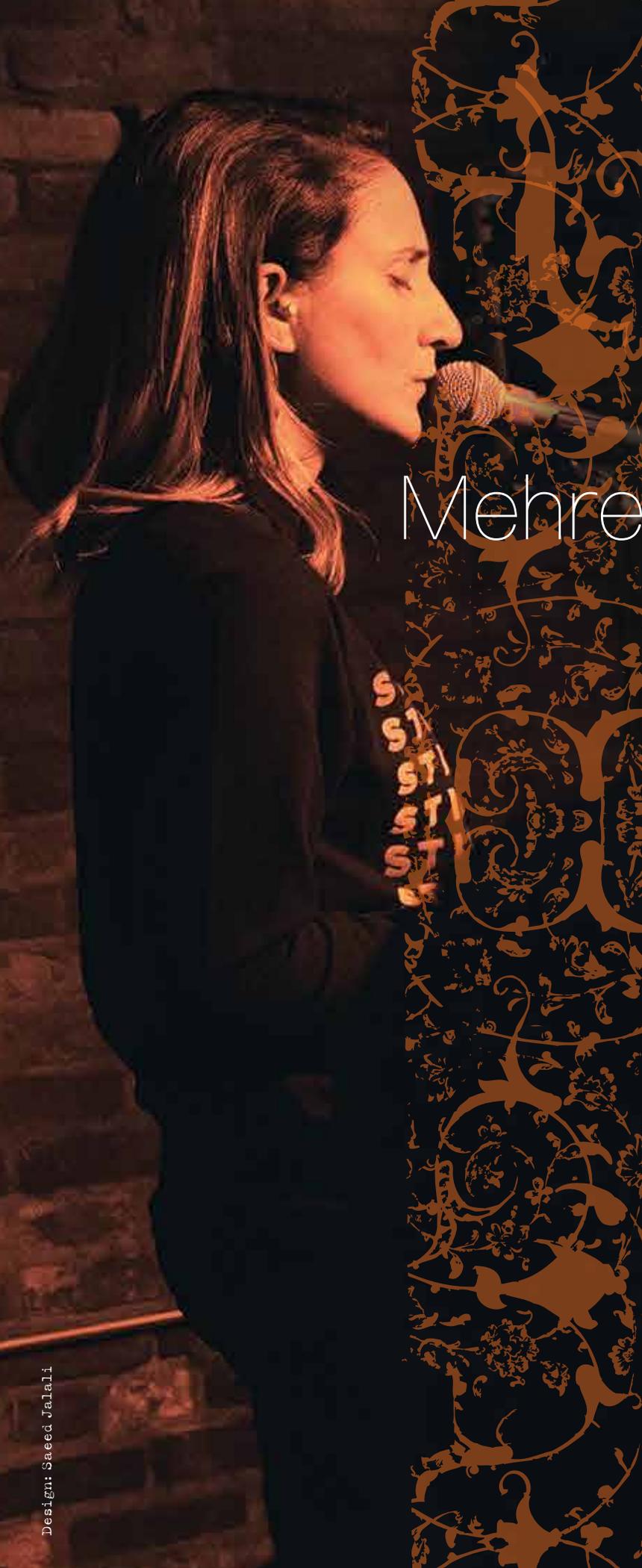
There is virtually very little possibility of *Aspergillus flavus* contamination in agricultural products produced in the U.S., and all food products are controlled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Good agricultural practices, plant disease management, and adequate storage conditions limit mycotoxin levels in the food chain. Grain sorting using UV light illumination for aflatoxin reduction is common (6). If corn oil, for example, was produced from contaminated *Aspergillus* mold, the cooking oil production process usually goes through several steps such as deoxidation, decolorization, and deodorization to prevent foreign matter in the product. Usually if the level of contamination exceeds the maximum safety limit, the food product would not be allowed to enter the market. Therefore, food contamination with aflatoxin and citrinin is very rare.

Safeguards at home

Controlling moisture and humidity is the key to control mold growth. Keeping humidity levels in your home at low levels, preferably less than 50% humidity all day, will prevent mold growth. Circulating air in the house or the use of a dehumidifier are good options. Refrigerators contain moisture which is conducive to mold growth. Regularly cleaning the inside and the door rims with diluted bleach can reduce fungal growth. Storing bread and food in airtight containers can also reduce mold contamination. If food is not being used within 3 to 4 days, freezing is another option. Sinks, sponges, and washing cloths are good sources for mold growth and should be kept dry. Sponges need to be replaced weekly to prevent mold and bacterial growth. Finally, experts suggest that one should never sniff a moldy item because it can cause severe respiratory problems.

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From: *Recipes My Mother Taught Me*
by Maryam Khatamee Cornejo

Recipes for Fall/Winter Days . . .

Chelow: Fluffy saffron steamed plain basmati rice

Makes 6 servings
Soaking time: 4 hours
Cooking time: 1 hour

For Soaking the Rice:

3 cups long grain basmati rice, ¼ cup sea salt, 4 cups lukewarm water

For the Crust (Tah-dig):

4 large russet potatoes, salt as needed, 7 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

For the Garnish:

1 tsp. ground saffron, dissolved in hot water, 2 tsp. melted butter or olive oil

Directions:

1. **Soak the rice:** Wash the rice by placing it in a fine mesh colander and rinsing it under lukewarm water for about one minute or until the water runs clear.
2. Dissolve ¼ cup salt in 4 cups of lukewarm water and put clean rice into the salty water.
3. Soak for 4 hours.
4. **Meanwhile,** peel the potatoes and slice them into ¼ inch-thick slices. Place potato slices in a medium bowl, cover with cold water, and set aside.
5. Drain soaked rice in a fine-mesh colander.
6. Bring 7 cups of water to boil in a large nonstick pot (about 8 quarts) and pour drained rice into the boiling water. Boil for 5 minutes, gently stirring once. Then drain rice in a large fine-mesh colander.
7. Drain potatoes, pat dry, sprinkle salt on both sides of each slice, and set aside.
8. In the same large nonstick pot, pour 7 tablespoons of oil and place potato slices across the bottom of the pot, one by one. This will make a golden crispy potato crust called tah-dig when the rice is cooked.
9. Now, with one large slotted spoon, transfer drained rice, one spoonful at a time, and gently place it on top of the potatoes, gradually shaping the rice into a cone, leaving space for the rice to expand.
10. Pour the dissolved saffron butter/oil mixture over the rice. Cover the pot with a lid and cook the rice for 15 minutes over medium heat and then 30 minutes over low heat.
11. Remove the pot from heat, remove the lid, and take out two slotted spoonfuls of saffron flavored rice to set aside for garnish.
12. Continue using a slotted spoon to transfer the cooked rice, one spoonful at a time, to a serving platter or individual plate, without disturbing the potato crust. Mound the rice into a cone and scatter the saffron rice garnish over the top of the rice cone.
13. With a slotted spoon, detach the layer of potato crust from the bottom of the pot and place it onto another dish or next to the rice, serving immediately while warm.



Spinach and Prune Stew:

Makes 10 servings
Cooking time: 3 hours

Ingredients:

2 lbs stew meat (beef, veal, lamb)
1 cup finely chopped cilantro
4 cups finely sliced onions
2½ Tbsp. dry fenugreek
2 cups (10 oz.) pitted prunes (approx. 36)
1½ tsp. turmeric
2 Tbsp. salt
1 tsp. ground black pepper
1½ Tbsp. lime juice
7 cups of water
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
5 lbs fresh spinach, chopped, steamed, and squeezed dry or
4 boxes frozen chopped spinach (10 oz. each), thawed and squeezed dry

Directions:

1. Heat up five tablespoons of oil in a dutch oven over medium high heat. Sauté onions until golden. Add meat, sprinkle with salt and pepper, stirring frequently until meat is golden brown on all sides. Add turmeric and stir for another minute. Add 7 cups of water, stir, and cover. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low. Simmer for 40 minutes.
2. Heat up remaining oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium high heat and sauté the defrosted spinach for about 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Add dry fenugreek and cilantro, stir, and sauté for 2-3 more minutes.
3. Add spinach/cilantro/fenugreek to the meat mixture. Add prunes. Cover and bring to a boil. Cook over low heat for another 1½ hrs or until the stew reaches a thick consistency.
4. If meat is tender, add just the seasoning and transfer the stew into a deep serving dish. Serve warm and with chelow (fluffy saffron steamed plain basmati rice).

An Immigration Story: Kingsville

Reza Khabazian

Leaving your homeland and residing in another - with a totally new culture, language and set of laws and regulations - is very challenging and requires a lot of adaptation that, in most cases, is also very frustrating.

But, looking back at those challenges many years later makes some of them look funny, some amazing, and some, of course, sad. The truth is, no matter how we feel about them, the challenges are, for sure, part of the history of immigration that needs to be documented for use by our grandchildren or simply by historians to picture the hardship that first generation Iranians had to go through to meet those challenges.

The main purpose of this column is to encourage our readers to start telling their stories so we can present a diverse documentary. The first of this series--“How I Met A Dime”--was published in the May-June 2021 issue of *Peyk*. This is the third part of Mr. Khabazian’s story.

As expected, academically, my student life at Kingsville was going very smoothly.

College was full of Iranian students—mainly in the departments of engineering and agriculture—which was a blessing in one sense and detrimental in another sense. Having a number of Iranian students facilitated the process of adaptation to my new life but, at the same time, made expanding my English vocabulary more difficult.

Saeed, a student in the Engineering Department, was one of my first acquaintances. He was a very well-organized student with a remarkable knowledge of English in the final year of his studies. It was in his room that I met Jack. Contrary to Saeed, Jack was a lifelong student who showed no interest in graduating from the college. He regarded himself an expert in American life who knew the answer to any question raised by a newcomer like myself.

“Look, Reza, all of us who came to AAMRIKA had some difficulty to know the laws and regulations. Let me give you an example. A few months after my arrival, I got pulled over by a cop while driving. The officer came to my side of the car and politely said:

- ‘Good afternoon. Do you know why I stopped you?’
- ‘No, Officer,’ I replied.
- ‘I stopped you because you were driving 65 in a 30-mile-an-hour zone,’ he emphasized. ‘What was the rush?’
- ‘I was just following the sign that said 65 miles,’ I replied with utmost confidence.
- ‘Where did you see such a sign?’ he asked with great shock and surprise.
- ‘A few hundred feet behind us,’ I told him, pointing toward the direction of the sign.
- ‘Why don’t you drive in front and show me the sign.’

So, Reza, I started to drive slowly and the officer was following me till we arrived at the location.

- ‘Look, Officer! Actually the sign says 64.9 and I was just driving a fraction of a mile more than what was



permitted!’

- ‘Sir! What you are referring to is not a speed limit, but the price of gasoline,’ he replied, trying hard not to laugh out loud.”

Jack’s story made me feel better—and he came to my aid in another way. Most Iranian students were dependent on receiving money from the homeland, but a few, like myself, had to manage financial needs by working at odd jobs. When the small savings my wife and I had left neared depletion, finding a job became a necessity. This is when Jack came to my rescue. As I was walking on campus one day, I heard him calling me:

- “Reza, I found you a job!”
- “Thanks, Jack, what is it?”
- “I was at Kmart the other day and I noticed they are looking for help. Just go there today before the position is filled.”
- “Oh my God! You are a lifesaver! I will definitely go today right after my classes.”
- “As you enter the store, go all the way to the back, then turn left and you’ll see the sign for help. Don’t delay! Ok? Kmart is a very good company to work for.”

After class, I rushed home not only to bring the good news to my wife, but also to change into a nice outfit before I drove to Kmart with utmost excitement. Following Jack’s directions, I got to the end of the store, turned left, and saw a long metal pole that was holding a sign that read “Need Help” with a small metal switch right in reach. I waited a few minutes looking for someone who I could ask about a job opportunity, but I was unsuccessful.

With hesitation, I reached the metal switch and turned it upward. A blue light started revolving at the top and, in no time, one of the employees came to me:

- “Can I help you?” Kmart Lady asked.
- “Yes! I am here to apply for a job,” I replied.
- “But we are not hiring at this time,” she emphasized.
- “Excuse me, Madam, but this sign says you are,” pointing at the “Need Help” sign.
- “This is not an employment sign, rather a sign that



customers can call us if they need help in the store.” And with that she pressed on NEED HELP and the blue light appeared again.

- “Oh... I am sorry, I am sorry, I am sorry!”
- “No problem... have a good day,” she said while walking away.

That incident closed the book of Jack for me forever.

I realized: *“I need to do all I have in my power not to be like him. I need to improve my vocabulary and knowledge of English seriously so to stop embarrassing myself.”*

The next time I saw Saeed, I told him the Kmart story. He almost fainted from laughing and encouraged me to be patient, emphasizing that I should focus on my school work and keep looking at the classified section of the daily paper. The advice paid off and in a few weeks I found my first job at a local motel as a maintenance person.

Saeed believed listening to radio stations, watching movies, and reading papers were the best ways to upgrade vocabulary. But I was too embarrassed to tell him that the way news anchors and movie characters spoke was too fast for me to follow. The problem persisted until the day I was at a small store close to our apartment in which I heard a piece of music whose lyrics I could entirely understand.

- “Excuse me, Sir, what is this station?” I asked the clerk.
- “Ny...Fo...Van FM,” he replied with a very heavy southern accent.
- “What is the name of this music? What type?” I asked.
- “Cown...try music.”

Finally, I’d found my cup of tea and became the only Iranian with dark hair and a big black mustache constantly listening to the 94.1 FM Country Music station and memorizing the lyrics!!

“Sitting on my porch on Saturday ni.....ght”

“Beer in my hand all thru the ni.....ght”

Or:

“Loving you is wro.....ng.....I don’t wanna be right.”

Not too long after my exposure to Country Music, the second

outlet for improving my English arrived by mere accident. Turning channels on our small black and white television on a Sunday morning drew my attention to a program that was broadcasted from an event at a Mega Church. The pastor—with a zillion eye catching emotions and an easy-to-understand vocabulary—was speaking to an amazingly large crowd. His incredible passion got me mesmerized as well as the crowd listening to him with tears running down their faces.

The fact that I could more or less understand him, plus his enormous energy and passion, got me hooked to become one of his regular listeners; however, the book of religion was shut for me a long time prior, starting from my college years in Iran. Perhaps I was the only follower of this pastor who was not interested in *what* he was preaching but *how* he was speaking... to such a degree that missing some heavy words such as resurrection, gospel, and so on did not deter me from looking forward to the next Sunday! It was such a laughing matter for me to listen to one of his speeches in which he was trying to convince his listeners that Fidel Castro was to blame for overflowing the drug market in America solely because of his intention of deterring American youngsters from learning the teachings of Jesus Christ!!

It showed clearly how similar their mindset is from the Mullahs in Iran who were posing to bring democracy to replace the so-called dictatorship of the Shah’s regime.

The third outlet that I found to improve my English was listening—and most of the time memorizing—the commercials broadcasted on television and on the radio. Lines such as “Maxwell House is coffee you can count on” has been engraved in my mind even after so many years!

It did not take too much time for me to realize that the environment of our college was so divided. The majority of students were whites followed by Hispanics and Iranians and other minorities. Due to the fact that whites were very hesitant to mingle with nonwhites, the Iranians either gathered around their own countrypersons or got involved with Hispanics, whose culture was not too far away from Iranian culture. This closeness was the root of a number of emotional relationships, many of which ended in family unions (often, male Iranian students marrying female Hispanic students), which provided opportunities to achieve green cards to stay in the U.S. as the political situation in Iran worsened.

Those exposures played, without a doubt, a major role of knowing about the culture of America, which included getting familiar with the concept of Christmas and New Year as well as Thanksgiving, Halloween, Cinco de Mayo, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Labor Day. Adding to the above list, learning about the regulations of baseball, football, and other sports events were necessary to have something to talk about with Americans at large.

The major gathering for Iranians was in front of television sets listening to the news of a serious uprising that was happening in the homeland. Fiery discussions after any daily news between students belonging to Moslem student organizations and those claiming to belong to the left soon became a daily norm.

The situation got worse as the homeland went through a revolution that will be the topic of the next issue....