

Some thoughts on my time in Iran

I never really thought about putting my thoughts about my time in Iran on paper until I received an e-mail from someone in the Peace Corp office about the 50th anniversary. It's been 38 years since I left Shar-e-kurd, Iran and I have to say it was probably one of the best and most fulfilling times of my life. What made it more special was that I was a Marine Corps veteran who had served in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. Two completely different life experiences. But I have always said that Marine Corps training got me through the first year in Iran. And the time spent in Iran gave me a different outlook of the world in general. Those were difficult times in the early 70's. The 72 Olympic massacre, Idi Amin in Uganda, Israel against all the Arab nations, Vietnam and all the trouble back in the states, airplane hijackings and on and on. But in my little piece of the world in Shar-e-kurd, Iran I was the only American. I arrive with only two bags after a very long dusty bus ride. No one knew who I was. Everyone was staring and wondering who this foreigner was. A local policeman came and took me to their version of a hotel until my paperwork could be verified. Three days later I was met by my school principal and welcomed to my new home. By the end of the day I had a house, unfurnished of course, and was expected to begin teaching the next day. It seemed like everyone knew that an American was now living in the Village. I became known simply as "mister" to many people. Listening to the BBC radio broadcast at midnight was my only source of listening to the English language. When I first arrive I had no electricity. A single oil burning light and heater was all I had. I have to admit that I ask myself several times what had I done. Other Volunteers in Iran had been sent to large cities like Teheran, Tabriz, Mashad, Isfahan or Rasht just to name a few. But me and another Volunteer were selected to go out from the big cities to the outer villages where the tribes were and was tasked to start training programs to help the tribes stay in one area. I put together a welding program with my counterpart and proceeded to teach them welding with the hope they could get a job at the Russian steel mill in Isfahan.

Those two years serving in the Peace Corp helped create the man I am today. I am much more tolerant of people and their cultural differences. I know that no matter where in the world you may live all you really want is to grow old, live in peace and raise your families. And quite frankly it bothers me a great deal when I hear people talk about the IRANIANS because of what they hear on TV and radio and what is printed in the newspapers. The Iranians are some of the kindest, generous and loyal people. I still considered them my family.

One quick story: I had a cat that I named "Nixon" and the people couldn't understand why the CIA did not come and take me back to America to prison because I named my cat after the president of the United States. An Iranian wouldn't dare try something like that with the Shah.