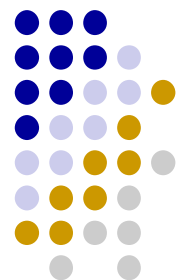




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My Iran Journal

**Sunday, April 25, 2004:
We're On Our Way**

Well, we're off, setting out for the San Francisco Airport on the first leg of our 24-hour journey to Tehran.

We carry the concerns of our families and colleagues who fear for our safety and the disapproval of some who worry about any possible political fall-out of visiting what has been deemed by President Bush an "Axis of Evil" country.

We've talked at length among ourselves and with others about the wisdom of our trip, about whether our goals outweigh any risk we may be assuming in traveling to the Middle

By Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef

East right now. We remain convinced we should go, that our desire to reestablish academic ties, to reopen the free exchange of students and scholars and to further cultural understanding overrides our concerns. Our conversations with our Iranian hosts and with the U.S. state department provide us with sufficient reassurance of a safe trip.

Our journey actually began nearly five years ago, when fellow traveler Moe Mohanna (a Sacramento businessman and current member of the UC Davis Foundation Board) hosted an event to raise scholarship funds for Iranian-American students. That gathering eventually

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Saving Lives Is All In A Day's Walk

By Gina Guasticci

When many people hear the word cancer they get nervous. Many images pop into their mind but it is not as hopeless as it seems. People can help raise money for the American Cancer Society (ACS) to fund cancer research and education.

One of the most unique experiences I had at Davis was participating in the UC Davis Relay for Life. Relay for Life helps raise money for ACS. People organize into teams and ask for donations. In the second year of the event UC Davis raised around \$124,000.

The money from the event helps fund cancer research and services for cancer patients. In fact several UC Davis researches have received money in the past from ACS. Also ACS provides cancer education and services for patients such as transportation to and from the doctor. Many people have benefited from the ACS and we should continue to help out any way we can. But Relay for Life is more than just money, it is about the fun experiences of being with friends trying to help a good cause.

First teams set up tents on Toomey Field at 10am on Saturday, April 9 and started walking. Through out the day there were bands, free food, volleyball, and of course walkers. One of my personal memories was walking with friends at 2am singing Disney songs so we could stay awake. Many people enjoy the event and some even walk over 20 miles! Even though we were tired and our feet hurt we still kept walking. Later as I watched the scoreboard countdown the hours, I began to reflect on what I was doing. I was giving up 24 hours of my time so someone else could have the chance to see another day.

The important thing about Relay for Life is you have fun while helping others. Everyone there is united in the fight against cancer and is willing to sacrifice one day in a year to help others. Please if you have never participated before, consider doing so. Remember that if we work together, there is HOPE. •

Spring 2005

Newsletter

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led to an invitation to the president of the University of Tehran to visit UC Davis; but when he attempted that trip in 2002, he was denied a visa. So we decided then that we would take UC Davis to Iran.

So here we are, all six of us (Moe Mohanna; Neal Van Alfen, dean of the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences; Enrique Lavernia, dean of the College of Engineering; Bill Lacy, vice provost for university outreach and international programs; Bob Kerr, director of international alumni and visitors; and me), unsure what we'll experience this next week but eager to begin a dialogue. We're not going to Iran to make a political statement, nor are we seeking publicity. We're simply one university wanting to talk to another university about ways in which we can work together. And, perhaps in the process, one small step can be taken toward a return to normalcy in the Middle East.

Sunday, April 25:

Taking flight

Once we arrive at the Lufthansa gate area, our concern about journeying to Iran dissipates. In fact, our fears seem to be left behind in the U.S.

Enrique wonders if the only time there might be a problem with trips to the Middle East is if one asks about the laws and rules, as we did. Neal mentions that some of our faculty are planning to attend an international conference in Iran next year — organized from another country, with individuals coming from all over the world.

Neal also mentions that our California crops are much the same as Iran's, and that many of our 250 specialty crops originated in Iran and other parts of the Middle East thousands of years ago. Pistachios, for example, came to California some 80 years ago by way of Iran. With similar climates and irrigation and sustainability challenges, we've much to learn from each other.

As we taxi down the runway, the plane suddenly screeches to a halt. We hear another plane land or take off nearby. Our plane resumes its taxiing, but more slowly this time. I immediately think of some of the troubling e-mails we'd received since pre-trip stories appeared in our local newspapers. But then off we fly.

Monday, April 26:

Mid-way there

We land in Frankfurt without incident and make our way to the hotel for about four hours sleep before returning to the airport for the next leg of the trip to Tehran. I end up sitting next to an Iranian-American woman who's from Davis, used to work for UC Davis and has a daughter working at UC Irvine — the proverbial small world. She's returning to Iran for the one-year anniversary of her mother's death.

Tuesday, April 27:

At last, we arrive

We touch down in Tehran and are greeted at the end of the jet way by the director general of the University of Tehran's Office of International Relations and by the university's chief of protocol, who is also with the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. While we wait for our luggage, we chat a bit with our two hosts. Mohammad wears a black shirt under his suit coat — a sign his father has recently died. He will wear this shirt for 40 days without shaving. Both when his father died, and at the 40-day mourning mark, he will host a lunch for friends of his father. He served 900 lunches that first day and expects to do the same 40 days hence. And, on the one-year anniversary, there'll be another recognition of his father's death.

We see occasional armed soldiers, but certainly no more than we have seen in other countries — especially, for example, Taiwan but also South Korea.

We arrive at our hotel at 4 a.m. but find our rooms aren't ready. After phone calls home, we're soon to bed, anticipating our visits later today with the president of the University of Tehran and its engineering faculty.

After four hours sleep and a breakfast buffet featuring sausage and olives, we head to the Central Library and Document Center at the University of Tehran. We primarily spend our *My Iran Journal, continued from page 3* time in the section of the library dedicated to saving old books for future readers ("old" here means up to 1,400 years old).

Continued on page 8

My Iran Journal, continued from page 2

We then meet the president of the University of Tehran, Faraji-Dana, for lunch. He's a very impressive 45-year-old, much interested in

Racing for a Cure:

Help our Community to the Finish Line

By Christina Watson

Awareness is oftentimes the most powerful vaccine for an illness. The knowledge of the seriousness of breast cancer was nearly obsolete a decade ago, but thanks to organizations such as the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, knowledge of this disease and the preventative measures individuals can take against it has increased tremendously. The annual Komen Race for the Cure is a wonderful opportunity anyone can take to show their support by donating time, money, and maybe a little leg work for a pervasive cause.

Although this year's Race has already passed on May 7th, 2005, the fundraiser will be here once again next May at Cal Expo in Sacramento. Below is some general information about the race, and what you can do to help support the cause next year.

What is the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation?

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation was founded in 1982 by Nancy Brinker to honor the memory of her sister, Susan G. Komen, who died from breast cancer at age 36. The Foundation is an international organization with a network of volunteers working through local affiliates and Komen Race for the Cure events fighting to eradicate breast cancer as a life-threatening disease by advancing research, education, screening and treatment.

What Is the Komen Race for the Cure?

The Komen Race for the Cure is the largest series of 5K runs and walks in the world, and is open to everyone who wants to help in the fight against breast cancer. Since its origination in 1983, this Race has grown from one local race with 800 participants to a national series of over 100 races with more than 1.4 million participants. Proceeds fund global research efforts and local breast health outreach programs.

Where does the money go?

Up to 75% of all net funds raised by the local

Affiliate go back into the community providing education, screening, and support services. At least 25% of net funds go to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation Award and Research Grant Program.

From mother and grandmothers to friends and coworkers, breast cancer has become an epidemic among women of all ages, and most everyone has been affected by the disease in one way or another. This year, over 22,000 entrants participated in the race. I have personally run the 5k for the past 5 years, and each year my admiration for the support of our community grows. The Race for the Cure is an immensely rewarding experience, for both the participants and the afflicted. So mark next May in your planners, get your running shoes ready, and prepare for an opportunity, healthy for the body and soul.

For information about the Komen Sacramento Affiliate/ Race for the Cure information, visit www.sackomen.org or call (916) 492-6474. •

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Secret Stories from Asia

By: Aldrich Tan

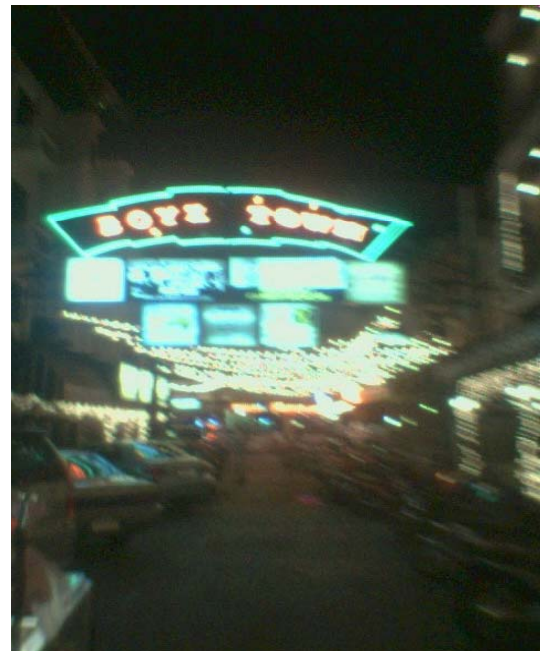
He gazes at me longingly. He looks faintly like my first love. I do not know what draws me to him first. His soft black spiky hair. His curt black eyes slanted downwards and yet still looking at me. He smiles coyly. It's a soft smirk as his lightly colored lips smile at me, desiring to be kissed. His lean brown skin, baring small and toned muscles aching to be touched, gesture down to his white boxer briefs. And a button next to the two-digit number that I cannot remember but for the purposes of this story, it is 28.

Mr. 28 is a prostitute at one of the many gay bars in Pattaya, Thailand, one that I visited during my Spring Break. I accompanied my mom, sister and my mom's friends on a group tour to Thailand and Hong Kong. But I choose not to write about the tour. You will not read descriptions of Bangkok's Grand Palace inlaid with gold lacquer nor about elephant rides in Pattaya. One can read that out of the standard guidebook about Asian countries anyways. I choose to speak about what is not written in those guidebooks. As French feminist theorist Helene Cixous spoke to women: "I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man." I choose to write about homosexuality in Thailand and Hong Kong from my eyes as an openly gay Asian American man. At this point, I must acknowledge the privilege that I am "out" to my family in which I am able to sneak around Bangkok and Hong Kong and go on separate adventures than the typical Asian American tourist in Asia.

I will not speak like an expert on Asian homosexuality but this is what I do know. For more information, there are great queer Asian resource sites like *Fridae.com*, a Singapore-based queer Web site that reports about gay lifestyle in Asia. Asian countries still have conservative attitudes towards queer lifestyles. Thailand happens to be the most liberal attitude towards homosexuality. But as I discovered from my trip, the liberal attitude is problematic because it focuses on tourism. Sex tourism. Thailand is also the tourist capital of Asia and even other Asians travel to the warm and tranquil beaches of Pattaya in the daytime and sex tourism at night. A large percentage of these tourists are

gay men from America and Europe seeking to enjoy the company of attractive Thai guys.

I snuck out of the hotel on Tuesday night, March 29 with my openly gay tour guide Chai to discover the hidden world of gay Pattaya. I was sexually frustrated and wanted to go to a gay dance club. Earlier that day, my tour guide came out to me on one of Pattaya's beaches when I asked him where the legendary Thai gay bars are. Chai offered to take me someplace that wasn't on the itinerary. After my mom checked in for the night, Chai and I met at the lobby of the Amari Resort hotel where we are both staying in. We walked out to the main street and he hailed a taxi, which looked more like a pick-up truck. The trip down to the "business dis-



trict," as he called it, cost only 100 baht (one US dollar equals 36 baht). As we traveled down to South Pattaya, he started to quietly hold my hand and smiling goofily.

South Pattaya is the red-light district of Thailand. We walked past three blocks of heterosexual strip shows and brothels till we reached the rainbow neon lights of "Boyz Town", the gay version of the district. The district was a two block radius of small gay clubs with names like "Hunks" and "Meatmen" spliced with small gyms and saunas in between. Chai led me into one of the bars and we sat at the corner of the bar. We ordered cokes and

sat down. Ten of the most attractive Asian men that I've ever seen stood on a raised platform across from us. That was the only thing beautiful about this scene. The guys were swaying to cheesy music. Chai told me that most of these men were used to servicing older white tourists that the site of an Asian guy.

Chai told me that I could conduct "business" with one of the attractive men for 1,500 baht. I looked at him and then looked towards the other guys. The men were each dancing in a circle on the raised platform and looking at me longingly. Every time, I gazed at one of them, they smiled back at me, eager and longing. Chai continued to sip his Coca Cola and then pulled out a cigarette, waiting for me to choose one. I knew that the sex trade was a humongous market in Thailand. I look to the left of me and see a strapping young Asian guy with a lean body walk toward an elderly white man. He leans over and they talk a little bit. Then the guy escorts his customer to the door at the back of the bar and they go in to conduct their "business" affairs.

Having witnessed the business transaction, I decided that the brothel scene wasn't for me. We left the bar. It was tragic to see homosexuality reduced to a commodity. Back on the taxicab, Chai holds my hand again. He tells me that all he really wants is a boyfriend as the pickup truck takes us back up the main road to the beach resort area. I look back and see the neon lights of Boyz Town gradually fade away in the distance. We walk back to my hotel room. It is 10 p.m. My sister is still out with her friends by the pool. That night, I give Chai what he wants. We don't have sex. Instead, we quietly cuddle under my hotel sheets. His body feels warm next to mine. He closes his eyes and nods to sleep resting on my welcoming chest. "Amazing," he whispers to me the only English words that come to his mind, "amazing." We lay on the bed for awhile and hear the crickets chirp outside. After a while, he gets up, gets dressed and shuffles away just as my sister walks in, telling me about the joys of drinking for the first time. The legal drinking age of Asia is 18.

The next day, we return to Bangkok. We can't tell my mother what had happened that night and Chai resumes his position of being our tour guide. He drops our tour group at our hotel, the *Amari*, and walks out of the double doors of the hotel building. It is the last time that I see him. He doesn't even return to say goodbye when the other tour guides do at our final dinner in Thailand. I feel sad for Chai. It's hard to think about living in an-

other country and feel that one's sexual identity is reduced to a commodity sold on a market place for a price.

My queer journey resumed in Hong Kong. On the day before we were supposed to leave for San Francisco, our group wanted to go take the tram up Victoria's Peak to get a better view of the city at night. I noticed that the wax museum at the top of the peak had a memorial exhibit dedicated to HK pop singer Leslie Cheung. I didn't know much about him except for an article in *Noodle Magazine*. Lovingly nickname "Ge-Ge" (big brother) by his fans, Leslie Cheung was a famous Chinese actor and singer in Hong Kong. He combined the class of Cary Grant and the looks of Jet Li and Bruce Lee. After tabloids caught him holding hands with his manager Daffy Tong, Leslie came out as bisexual. However, on April 1, 2003, Leslie was battling a gradually failing career and depression. He had at-



tempted suicide before but this time, he succeeded. He leapt off the balcony of his hotel room in the Mandarin Oriental and died instantly. That night, Asia lost one of its biggest queer icons out of homophobia and personal trauma. The memorial exhibit, organized by his partner Daffy, was a tribute to Cheung's career and memory. On impulse, I forked the extra HK\$100 to go to the museum. When we

Secret Stores from Asia, continued on page 5

Secret Stores from Asia, continued from page 5

got to the top of Victoria's Peak, my mom found out that I bought the ticket and was furious because we also have a wax museum in San Francisco. "You had better write a good essay about why you wasted my money," she told me curtly.

Transitions

By Jaime Grace

Making the transition from college to what lies beyond—be it grad school, travel, or a nine-to-five job—can be exceedingly difficult. This year's graduating seniors are getting closer every day to facing an overwhelming mountain of life-altering choices. At a large school like UCD, it is not possible for every student to get the individual attention they might wish. The manpower required for such an endeavor is staggering and in the end is not possible. So fall quarter freshman and spring quarter seniors have an interesting similarity: both are unsure of the path ahead and often seek guidance from advisors, counselors, etc. The problem however, is that as seniors, no one can tell you your path or what grad school to go to or in which city you could find a job.

While I have had my own share of frustrating experiences in being known by my ID number rather than my name, I do not think I would trade it. I have learned to fight when I feel I have been wronged, learned a degree of tenacity before unknown when I have had to go from person to person to person to fix a mistake in paperwork. When I needed an internship for the grad school I will be attending in fall and there were no spots left, I went out and networked until I formed one myself. While that was not easy it was far more valuable. I have honed the same skills that I will need in the transition into true adulthood. And while I doubt more than one or two professors will remember me, my education has been amazing.

In the end I have few complaints over being "just a number" in a large public school. That same anonymity that prevented my high school peers from attending a school in the UC system has proved invaluable; I have not only been educated in an academic sense, I have also been educated in life. This may sound cliché, but keep in mind there is a reason that certain phrases or ideas are repeated again and again—there is truth in them. As I and my graduating peers now turn to the next phase in life, I am grateful to have been given the chance to attend UCD and wish the best to those who remain. •

I breezed through most of the museum. Like the typical wax museum, it featured famous American celebrities like Marilyn Monroe, Bill Clinton, Michael Jackson, etc. But it also had famous Asian celebrities like Anita Mui, Jet Li, Jackie Chan (the mascot of Hong Kong,) and Michelle Yeoh. Finally, I reached the *Leslie* exhibit located between a montage of the US presidents and Brad Pitt's statue. White garlands surrounded the exhibit, similar to those that fans laid out at the Mandarin Oriental and at Cheung's house following his suicide. A montage of Leslie's famous movies played in the background. Leslie's figure was striking. He wore a full black Chinese garb with one hand behind his back. He stood with dignity. I now had the privilege of standing face to face with the first major queer Asian icon ever. I looked into Leslie's eyes and saw that he had the same slanted eyes I do and the same dark hair that I do. It's hard to find those faces within American society where Asian faces still remain invisible and gay shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *Queer as Folk* continue to deny the existence of gay Asian Americans.

Other visitors came to the memorial exhibit. Mostly female fans who giggled as they leaned lovingly into Leslie's stone cold body. I felt pangs of burning jealousy. Get your hands off my man! It angered me *Secret Stores from Asia, continued from page 6* that China still was a society where the *tongzhi* face was still invisible. Beacons of light like Leslie Cheung were starting to open doors but his suicide closed them shut. He became one of those typical tragic heroes in gay films who end up killing themselves for the so-called

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06/04/2005 : KVIE Pledge Drive

Check out the website for more info and updates:

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purity of society. After looking at the memorial for a while, I drew the strength within me to step up on the platform and have my picture taken with Leslie's statue. It was nerve-wracking seeing all of the female fans' memorial wreaths and letters and others going up on the platform as their boyfriends took pictures with them. Then, I walked up and placed my own male arms around Leslie and gently held his hands. A few people turned around, looking in semi-shock at this young gay Chinese guy having such the audacity to embrace Leslie in the same way that the girl fans did. But it felt right and I have no regrets doing it.

That night, I went with my mom and sister to the Avenue of the Stars. Think of the Hollywood Walk of Fame with famous Chinese actors and directors. Leslie Cheung's star was installed one year after his death so he didn't get to place his handprints on it like Jet Li did. I look out across the vast ocean and see the bright neon lights of the city's tall skyscrapers in luminous rainbow colors. Leslie's Hong Kong is indeed beautiful.

I sneak out again and pick up a gay Asian magazine from the nearby magazine stand. The only characters I recognize in the magazine *tongzhi*, the word for homosexual in China. An article in blatant English: "I Hate Leslie Cheung!" After buying the magazine, I immediately flip to the section entitled "I Hate Leslie Cheung!" It's a letter written to the editor by a frustrated closeted gay Chinese man. It's on two pages. One page is in English. "He was proud, rude and daring," the letter starts. "His death shattered the dreams of our youth," the letter says, "wiped out our dreams of 'being old with style'." Hate him, hate his leap of faith." The words appear again, large and bold and white. Even looking at those words now brings tears to my eyes. For gay men and women in Asia, Leslie was their hope. He was out of the closet and openly accepted with his partner Daffy. My memories travel back to Chai in Thailand. I'm saddened by the thought that Chai will never find a boyfriend or husband in a society where homosexuality is regarded as a commodity instead of a lifestyle. Without Leslie, how will queer Asians, as the letter says, become "old with style?"

The same question is in America: What is it like to age gay gracefully? In a new book called *The Tragedy of Today's Gays*, queer American AIDS activist Larry Kramer that the AIDS epidemic and unprotected sex wiped out an early generation of queer men. As a result, the new generation of queer Americans living in the U.S. also does not have role models telling them how to age gracefully. In a movement consisting of both sex-positivity and monogamy for homosexuals, the same-sex marriage ceremonies in San Fran-

cisco seem alien to me. How can I comprehend the idea that two men or two women can legally marry each other when my queer brothers and sisters in the university's Asian Pacific Islander Queers cannot come out to their relatives. Traveling to Asia made me realize that I'm not Asian, nor American. Instead, I am a product of two different cultures and two different queer histories. Stonewall on one side and Leslie on the other.

But there is one privilege that I do have. I am like Leslie because I am an openly gay Chinese-Filipino American. I carry the burden and benefit of being out to my parents. My gift to Leslie is my success. Going to Asia was my wake up call. In America, we have the option of having relationships and dating, compared to the sex-tourism of Thailand. Being a college student and an openly gay Asian American has opened doors for me, career-wise and I look forward to graduating, working as a journalist. And someday, I will find a partner and fall in love with him and adopt children. Even with a conservative president, there are still loopholes that enable queer people (and queer people of color) to live lives that allow them to become "old with style" in the United States. And perhaps, angry queer men like the one who wrote the scathing Leslie Cheung will transform his memorial into their quest of growing old, out and proud, in Asia.

I'm planning my second trip to Asia. I hope to go back to Thailand someday with my partner on a honeymoon, back to the beautiful beaches of Pattaya. Then we'll fly to Hong Kong and visit Leslie's star at the Avenue of the Stars as we hold hands. Two gay Asian men in love, like Daffy and Leslie, and not afraid of expressing that love because we can. I journeyed to Asia expecting the typical sight-seeing fanfare...and found myself in a queer story that yearns to tell its story to a public that is now ready to hear it. •

any relationships we might build. He notes his university is pursuing a “2 and 2” exchange program with Indiana University/Purdue University in Indianapolis and also a one-person plant taxonomy exchange with UC Berkeley. We have to find out more about both.

The afternoon is devoted to meetings with the engineering faculty. It’s very clear the trade embargo has made it difficult for them to buy new equipment or to obtain replacement parts. The embargo’s effect shows up on the streets, as well, where cars are mostly pre-1979. Occasionally, though, their laboratory equipment was state-of-the-art, likely purchased through other countries.

President Faraji and I talk again that evening. He’s very much wanting to establish collaborative ties and hopes those ties will expand to other universities.

He also expresses puzzlement that his country rather than Saudi Arabia has been so heavily targeted by the U.S. — particularly because Saudi Arabia spawned the majority of those associated with the September 11, 2001 attack. The relationship between our two countries is certainly complicated and challenging, from the 19 revolution and overthrow of the shah, the hostage-taking at our embassy and our support of Iraq and Saddam Hussein during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War — a war that stopped, as Moe Mohanna says, because the people of both countries just got tired of war. After that war, it was quite clear to Iran they had no aid or support.

We talk as well about how Iran’s left-leaning potential candidates for parliament have been eased out of the opportunity to run by the Supreme Council — the country’s 12 highest-ranking ayatollahs, who are responsible for keeping the government’s actions within the constraints of Islam. So the government will ease back toward the right after the next election and the country’s president will finish his second term and be unable to run again. It’s interesting that the people here are not expecting any of these changes to be huge or unusual, but simply the result of a government that will shift, as all governments do, but in this case toward the right by selection and support of right-leaning candidates.

We end the day at a dinner gathering of some 80 people with connections to UC Davis,

including the deputy minister of agriculture, who is an alum. The dinner features traditional chicken/lamb kabobs and a superb mushroom soup that I could make a whole meal of. We exchange gifts and listen to traditional Iranian music drawn from ancient mystic writings — it’s beautiful, quite unique to the Middle East.

Wednesday, April 28:

Off to more visits

We’re off to visit the University of Tehran’s agriculture faculty this morning. The dean (a very funny, interesting guy) wants us to visit every department, but that just isn’t possible — though we manage to cover a lot of ground before lunch.

We split up in the afternoon, with Neal, Bill and Bob staying to talk further with the Ag faculty, while Moe, Enrique and I visit a brand-new hospital built by the Rahimians (the family, with roots in Iran, also extends to Sacramento and has sent two sons to UC Davis). The hospital was built in an area of relatively poor people without easy access to medical care. A while back, the Rahimian family also built a high school for girls, with about 1,000 now enrolled.

On the way to the hospital, it feels as if one of the wheels of our car suddenly goes badly, badly out of balance. As luck would have it, a tow truck just happens by and we are quickly fetched by Laudan Rahimian, sister of Majid Rahimian. Before we leave, we take an outdoor picture with most of the nurses on duty. For the second time, I make the cultural mistake of attempting to shake the hand of one of them to whom we have given a UC Davis pen. When I first met Laudan, she put her hand out to make it clear that, in her case, she would recognize our custom.

Laudan’s husband drives us back to our hotel at breakneck speeds — up to 165 kilometers an hour (I haven’t done the conversion, but it’s close to 100 miles per hour) on a freeway where most people are going 65 miles per hour. The lane markers on these highways are not much more than suggestions, with often four lanes of traffic squeezed into three marked lanes. It’s just the normal way of things, but if you’re not used to it, it’s very worrisome. More than a couple of times, Enrique and I simultaneously yell something like “watch out” (or an internationally un-

derstood equivalent).

At 8:30 p.m. we depart for the parliament and dinner with the brother of President Khatami. Our conversation has many pregnant pauses; the three individuals with Khatami don't speak at all. But after dinner, we go outside to have tea. Khatami and I talk lots about his predictions for the future of universities, why he thinks Iran is viewed so negatively by the U.S., why any kind of "revolution" by students now would be completely different from the one in 1979 (they're more educated now, he says, and have a better realization of what can and can't be accomplished by the overthrow of any government). He recognizes that, in this stage of Iran's evolution, theocracy is most likely to work but that it might not be the form of government that would necessarily serve well in the future. He feels very strongly there are not many ways to break down the stereotype that people in the world have of Iran, but believes the "university track" is a way that could be successful.

Thursday, April 29:

On to the 'Cal Tech of Iran'

After a breakfast of eggs, cold meats, cheeses, coffee, juices, milk and cold cereals, we set out for Sharif University of Technology – the Cal Tech of Iran. While women are as prevalent in Iranian universities as men (in fact, women slightly outnumber men), only about 30 percent of the students at technology universities are female (just as in the U.S.).

The university's president also expresses frustration that Iran has been singled out as part of the "Axis of Evil." He points to the culture, traditions and history of Persia (primarily Iran, he says, but also Armenia and Turkey) as different from Arab countries. Those countries do not share the ancient history and culture of Iran, the birthplace of most history and culture in the world, he says. Neither do Iranians support Al-Qaeda or the Taliban, he says. Mostly it's peace that's desired and a fair understanding of each other, he says.

After lunch, we depart for Isfahan and visits to two universities. From the air, we see essentially a salt plain; as we near the city, we see irrigated crops and mud adobe-type construction. The towns outside Isfahan look very poor; the city itself seems an oasis of trees, grass and flow-

ers.

The hotel is very nice (much nicer than the buildings around it), with televisions with perhaps 12 channels – most in Farsi, with soccer matches, an occasional NBA basketball game, "tame" American movies, one or two German-language channels, and BBC and CNN. We see pictures of the bombing of Fallujah on Iranian channels and on BBC and CNN. We're not getting a good review.

Dinner's with several alumni – including one who has an interest in the travel industry and has moved to Iran to be ready when it once again becomes an important destination. Another has gone into the business of university-related research parks there.

Our evening ends with a stroll at the ancient "lighted bridges" (one is 280 years old, another 480 years old). Groups of young people stop and sing under their arches, to the applause of others nearby.

Friday, April 30:

A marathon day

Today will be a very, very long day. We will not go to bed again until we are home.

Ahead are visits to the University of Isfahan (its president is a UC Riverside grad) and Isfahan University of Technology (its president is a UC Berkeley grad), as well as some sightseeing, and then a flight back to Tehran for an alumni/going-away gathering.

As we walk the city streets, unaccompanied by our hosts, we are treated warmly and graciously by adults and with curiosity and respect by children. We are struck with how young the population is – 50 percent under the age of 20 and 70 percent under 30. The teenagers are fun and engaging but sometimes very solemnly forthright. I will never forget, to the day I die, a young girl asking me, "Do you think we are all terrorists?" Other young people ask how they can come to America and eagerly accept our business cards.

We visit mosques, bazaars, palaces and a Christian church and enjoy our conversations. We see that men and women rarely mix, at least publicly – and that women are covered except for their faces, with some younger women wearing blue jeans as slacks and also makeup.

At an alumni gathering that evening at the

Rahimians' home, we meet with about 40 people with UC ties. All of the alums we've met this trip are proud of their alma maters and treasure their memories of their time in the U.S. They want their children to have the same opportunities they had, and are excellent ambassadors for American universities and for America, generally. They want, as well, for other Iranians to see America as they saw it and not as we've also been negatively represented in the media around the world.

We depart the party long after midnight and head to the airport for a 3:05 a.m. flight home.

Saturday, May 1:

Heading home/Next steps

We use our Frankfurt layover time to try to assess what we've experienced and to see possible next steps in forging a relationship with the Iranian universities we've visited.

We're all struck with the high quality of the faculty and students – their admissions standards, in fact, are tougher than UC's. Graduate study there is all done in English, and passing an English exam is part of the admissions process.

While this trip is a fruitful first step, we recognize the considerable challenges that lie ahead.

Perhaps the biggest is the current severe visa restrictions that make it virtually impossible for Iranians to travel to this country.

But one potential exchange possibility is the "2 and 2" program, where Iranian students would spend the first two years at their home university taking courses approved by UC and then come to America, to UC Davis, for the remaining two years of their program – giving us a bit more time to resolve the visa problem.

Another possibility is sending our students there, perhaps for summer study.

A third possibility would involve exchange of scholars based on real needs they have and we have – truly a two-way street.

And perhaps, as well, we can establish a formal alumni chapter in Iran to help us recruit outstanding students, host visiting students and scholars and provide internship opportunities.

After nearly 22 hours in the air and another two hours on California's Interstate 80, we arrive home tired but energized. In this initial visit, we didn't sign agreements or contracts with our

Iranian colleagues, but we sat together, we ate together, we discussed our separate countries and cultures together, and we came to better understand our universities, our similarities and differences, and our shared interest in a community of scholars without borders. I hope our trip moves us a step closer and, in the words of Sen. J. William Fulbright, in some small way helps "turn nations into people." •

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Thank you to all the contributors.

Special Thank you to Kaplan

Remember to keep track of any cool summer activities for Fall Quarter's Newsletter.

Have a great summer.