

tem unique to Iran and probably in use during Alexander's time.

A lone walled village a half mile away looked enticing to explore, yet we felt it was safer not to. Instead, several of us climbed a single barren hill for exercise. From its summit, we viewed our toy sized bus against the expansive desert.

Four hours passed without a sign of Graeme and Nino. We girls had found the mounds and a low culvert beneath the road near the bus to be ideal loo spots. We had all eaten from our own food reserves and some of our thermoses of water were almost empty. Seated on the ground beside the bus, we were all doing our own thing by now. Robert had organized a sing-along for some, Jen was writing again and I was into my correspondence. Finishing her composition, Jen read it to me:

#### Iran - Desert Region

Far away over the plains, always in the background, were the mountains--peculiar, rugged, uneven mountains; rocky, fierce and menacing. They became paler as their distance from us increased, appearing as though different shades of tawny-brown coloured each one. Their presence was softened by dust raised by the desert winds, which swirled blindly over the earth, forever gathering and depositing soil, moisture, whatever it could find and leave.

The plains however weren't bare; tufts of desert grass, small bare rocks, some trees, rocky outcrops, occasional cultivated areas actually green in this arid

clime, greatly relieved the sparseness of the landscape.

Near the cultivated areas stood the usual square adobe building with a rounded roof, protective thick walls with projecting wood boughs indicating the means whereby these erections continued to remain standing with support for the roof.

Earlier on we had noticed adobe huts, often in ruins, dotting the landscape. What these were intended for we were not certain, but Elizabeth, our scholar, felt that they may have protected deep wells, which was the most likely explanation.

We came upon a few herds of goats and sheep, tended usually by a lone shepherd, standing, watching, waiting silently. I wondered what he thought about in the long, lonely hours, out on that vast plain, his only company being his animals.

Neil interrupted the group with a sharp whistle. Thinking about the approaching night with yet no sign from our two companions, he ordered the fellows to unpack the camping gear. We were about to have our first lesson in setting up camp. He proceeded to tell us how to assemble the cooktent and the two and three-man tents. With all the tents spread out on the ground and their poles and pegs strewn around them, we set to work. But just as we were beginning to erect the tents, a large truck stopped, momentarily, disgorging Nino and Graeme. They had a used part for the wheel and set to work installing it while the rest of us rolled up the

tents, bagged them and replaced them in the boot.

The sun was setting behind the mountains when we boarded the bus and turned around for the long ride back to Isfahan. The wheel part was only a temporary solution and dictated that we travel not over 25 M.P.H.

Around 9 P.M., we drove into a small town hoping to find some food. We located a diner for truckers. Inside, we made our way around two large Harley-Davidson motorcycles with raucous motors idling, their headlights flooding the diner providing its only light. A power outage had caused no little confusion as the waiters ran about serving the locals, mostly men, who sat eating and visiting. Finding tables, we shouted our orders of chelo kabab and Pepsi to the waiters.

The platters full of dinner came soon and were plopped down on our tables littered with spilled rice from former customers. We didn't bother to ask for glasses; by now we were reconciled to bottled Pepsi. We were really rubbing elbows with the natives here.

We got back to Isfahan around 2:30 A.M. waking the same grumbling old Jahan Hotel attendant. The management found most of us rooms, but some had to sleep in the lobby with the attendant until further arrangements could be made.

Isfahan  
Wednesday to Saturday, April 14-17

Early on the morning of April 14, Neil telexed the Sundowners'

office in London for the needed ball bearing. By afternoon, the rest of the group moved into rooms at the Jahan. However, we would have to leave the Jahan by Good Friday because another bus group was expected.

During these added days in Isfahan, I caught up on sleep while my more energetic companions enjoyed daily walks through unexplored parts of the city and its periphery. One day three of the girls hired a cab out to the Shaking Minarets built in a way to cause both minarets to shake when either inner stairway was climbed. Another day some of the fellows and girls walked to the Fire Temples used by the followers of the ancient Zoroastrian religion.

At the temples, they learned that the religion was founded by Zoroaster who lived from 628-551 B.C. Prior to the Islamic conquest of Persia, this was Persia's religion. It emphasized good thoughts, good words and good deeds. A central theme to Zoroastrianism was the constant warfare between the good spirit, Ahura Mazda represented by the pure natural elements of fire, water and earth and the evil spirit, Ahriman. According to this religion, the entire history of the universe encompasses a period of 12,000 years which culminates as a savior appears, evil is finally defeated and good reigns eternally. From the Zoroastrian priests, called Magi, came the three who made their way to Bethlehem to adore the Christ Child.

Another day on one of their walks, Jen and Tanya discovered a clean and economical restaurant at the Iran Tours Hotel. It

catered to westerners by serving such entrees as meat loaf, fried chicken and roast beef. Like the Istanbul in Kabul, this restaurant became our regular haunt for our dinners in Isfahan. One evening, while waiting in its cocktail lounge for a table, Jen, Tanya and I spoke briefly with three American military advisors. They were in Iran to train Iranians to fly helicopters, a task which they found difficult and frustrating due to the east-west communication barrier. These Americans repeated what we had heard before regarding the Shah's dictatorial rule and cautioned us to keep any adverse opinions about the government to ourselves.

On Good Friday morning, April 16, we attended a service at St. Luke's Anglican Church. This had been arranged by Robert who had finally linked up with the Christian community. It was a lovely service with Iranians and westerners in attendance, but we had no time for visiting for we had to rush back to the hotel and check out.

Carrying all of our gear like army recruits, we trooped several blocks up the boulevard to the Iran Hotel. Even though we had to double up in our rooms, this hotel was more to our liking. It was modern and clean, had a nice restaurant and each room had its own bath.

That evening several of us girls dressed up to visit the Hotel Shah Abbas to hear the storyteller. We walked many blocks down the boulevard, turning into a side street, and soon came upon the sprawling hotel. Reputedly one of Iran's most beautiful hotels, it was converted in the late 1950s from a 17th century caravansary.

Upon entering the lobby, we stepped into a regal world hint-

ing at Iran's glorious past. We were so overcome by the pretentious surroundings that we almost forgot the storyteller. Golds, brass and stonework of various colors flowed in graceful patterns. We feasted our eyes on Islamic art mixed with contemporary styles. Large dark and light toned carpets were evenly placed on the highly polished stone floor with its one swirling floral design at the entrance. The curved mahogany reception desk, busy with attendants and well dressed guests, looked to be inlaid with gold leaf. Other guests relaxed on fine furniture waiting for friends. Tonight the chador was not to be seen. Large individual portraits of the Shah and his son looked down from one end of the lobby flanking either side of an arch to a room beyond.

We looked in on one of the three hotel dining rooms. It was even more splendid than the lobby with crystal chandeliers and brass lamps hanging from an ornate ceiling. A sweeping stairway descended from a brass railed mezzanine into the room, humming with diners in formal attire. The burgandy drapes at the windows matched the high-backed upholstered chairs at the linen covered tables set with fine china, crystal and vases of fresh red gladioli.

Our curiosity satisfied, we left the lobby for the grand courtyard to find the storyteller. In former times, the courtyard had been the camels' resting place. Today, instead, first and second floor balconies opened onto a reflecting pool, manicured gardens of lush grass, flowers, shrubs, poplars and some evergreens. A large swimming pool and sunning area were also available for the guests.

We walked quickly through the gardens to the high ceilinged

mosque-like alcove where the storyteller sat in white Persian garb on a large cushion speaking in English. Listeners, many of them westerners, seated on colorful sofas and pillows, seemed entranced by the story as a uniformed waiter unobtrusively served chai. Unfortunately for us, we were too late; there was no room.

We strolled leisurely back through the gardens and the lobby, leaving the premises. Upon reflection, I could well understand why this hotel was named for Shah Abbas I. It seemed to symbolize the man who, through architecture, desired to make Isfahan the fairest city in all the world.

Back on the boulevard, we found the juice stand where we had met Joe, and bought banana milkshakes before calling it an evening.

Saturday, the 17th, Graeme flew to Tehran to pick up the ball bearing which had been flown from London. Our leaders apparently didn't want the part "lost" between Tehran and Isfahan. Graeme returned from Tehran with the precious part the same evening.

Isfahan to Hamadan  
Easter Sunday, April 18

Walking several blocks carrying all our gear, we packed the bus around 8 A.M. and then proceeded to St. Luke's Anglican Church for the Easter Service. Neil and Graeme remained at the bus to install the ball bearing.

To celebrate the crux of our faith on this Easter morning with westerners and Iranians, some of whom were blind, was touching. Worshipping jointly the risen Lord, our savior, identified us all

as brothers and sisters in Him.

After the service, we had some time for visiting. Kathy and others of the group mingled with the blind. Tanya spoke with three middle-aged Australian missionary nurses who lived on the church compound. They invited some of us to one of their apartments for tea and biscuits. By coincidence, Jen discovered that she and one of the ladies had once worked together at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. It had been a long time since these women had been home, so they were eager to hear news of Australia.

Neil and Graeme with the bus met us at the church at 1 P.M. We headed northwest for an eight hour drive to Hamadan, leaving the desert lands. Derik, with whom I was sitting, had become ill; so ill that he asked if he could rest his head on my lap. So, for the long drive, I tried not to fidget.

Neil took the mike and told us that, due to our delays, Hamadan would be a one-night stop instead of the scheduled two. He informed us that, in Alexander's time, Hamadan was called Ecbatana and had been the summer residence of the Persian-Achaemenid kings. Alexander chose Hamadan as the place to store the remaining treasures his army carried away from Persepolis.

Then, Robert interjected that the tombs of Queen Esther of biblical fame, who had been the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes), and her cousin Mordecai were in this town. He also related that King Darius I sent men to Hamadan to find the decree which King Cyrus had made concerning the rebuilding of the Temple

in Jerusalem. He read us an excerpt from the Old Testament:

So King Darius issued orders that a search be made in the Babylonian archives, where documents were stored. Eventually the record was found in the palace at Ecbatana, in the province of Media. This is what it said:

'In this first year of the reign of King Cyrus, a decree has been sent out concerning the Temple of God at Jerusalem where the Jews offer sacrifices. It is to be rebuilt, . . . ' Ezra 6:1-3.

We arrived in historic Hamadan around 9 P.M. Derik was feeling somewhat better. Neil had not wired ahead for accommodations, so we tried several full hotels before concluding that we would have to go first class. The one-story hotel surrounded a large empty swimming pool. Its annexes spread out over well trimmed lawns interspersed with rose gardens. Palm trees grew everywhere.

Neil, after making our room arrangements, ordered our meal at the hotel restaurant; we would eat before unloading. Passing under the fifteen foot arch, we entered the spacious lobby, furnished only with large Persian carpets, a few wooden chairs and benches and drapes covering floor to ceiling windows. We descended a stairway to the restaurant, and were pleasantly surprised by the upbeat atmosphere: linen tablecloths, sparkling dishware and uniformed waiters. While

While waiting to be served, some of us girls visited the dining

room restroom. We were elated to see that it had standard toilets, modern fixtures and was generously stocked with toilet paper! (Some of us were running dangerously low.) Our superb meal was served shortly. It consisted of Wiener schnitzel, chips, light narn, a choice of beer or Pepsi and dessert.

After dinner we unloaded the bus and found our modest but clean and comfortable rooms which included sinks. I went to the showers down the hall with several others, wearing a towel around my neck. We lined up for showers in the coed bathroom. Some of the porcelain slabs were overflowing, but what had annoyed us in Katmandu no longer phased us. It was 11:30 P.M. and most of us just wanted a good night's sleep.

Hamadan to Tabriz  
Monday, April 19

We were off by 6 A.M., heading in our usual northwest direction. As far as I was concerned, today would be devoted to sleep. As I tried to get into a good sleeping position, Neil, with mike in hand, reprimanded the girls for taking rolls of toilet paper from the hotel restroom. He was very upset about the matter and its possible ramifications on Sundowners. The whole situation reflected our changing value system. At this point in time, toilet paper had become one of our most valued commodities.

In the late afternoon in hilly territory, I began reading Michener's Caravans. One of our loo stops was quite comical. The girls had called for a loo stop but Graeme continued to drive on

looking for some covering for us. But when this looked hopeless, we took our chances, asking Graeme to stop amidst rolling grassy hills. To get away from the road, twenty-seven girls climbed a gentle incline out of view of the fellows but not the road. Spaced several feet apart, our bare bottoms dotted the hill just as a convoy of trucks drove by, honking at what they saw. Fortunately, they did not stop. "If our friends could only see us now," someone yelled as the convoy passed.

As we were approaching Tabriz, Neil told us that this city was known for its many earthquakes. It was also an important trade center due to its strategic location on the trade routes to Russia and Asiatic Turkey and had been plagued by numerous conquerors.

In 1295 Ghazan Khan, the Mongol ruler of Persia (ruled 1295-1304) made Tabriz the chief administrative center of an empire that stretched from Egypt to the River Amu Darya in Afghanistan and from the Russian Caucasus Mountains to the Indian Ocean. He was the first Mongol ruler to convert to Islam and consequently, it became the religion of Persia. Marco Polo traveled through this city to and from the East just prior to Ghazan Khan's rule.

Our rundown hotel, located in the poorer section of Tabriz, required us to double up. I roomed with seven other girls. In addition to four single beds, four mattresses lay on the mat covered floor. Thus, there was no walking space in our room. The room's only other trappings were a sink and a small table. A dangling light bulb centered in the ceiling revealed more walls of

flaking paint.

Off the hall, two water closets each contained an unkempt porcelain slab toilet. The smell of urine was so strong that it penetrated to our section of the hotel and required one to hold one's breath while using either facility. Without doubt, this was our worst accommodation.

The group split up and found various restaurants for dining. As this would be our last night in Iran, some of us, having an abundance of rials, spent them on almonds, pistachios and nougat found in small shops, stalls or stands.

After eating, Jen and Tanya went for a walk, but I was so fatigued that all I could think about was getting to bed, especially when I learned that the entire group would be meeting in our room for devotions at 5:00 in the morning!