

Touran's Birthday

Touran Aalam or Touran Amir-Aalam Ashuri Houtcieff is my mother. She is 92. She lives in a luxurious and expensive home for the elderly in a chic Paris neighborhood. In fact so expensive is the place that her children can't afford it alone. Thus one of her sisters and three of her nieces chip in.

Touran's husband, my father, died in 1981 at the age of 85, mainly because he was tired of living.

Touran has only one sister left, my aunt Jahan.

Touran has only one brother left, my uncle Madjid.

He lives in America. I love him and respect him even more now that he is old and without the wealth and standing he enjoyed before the revolution. His great personality shines through even better without the glitter of money and fame.

Touran, fortunately has still quite a few nieces and nephews left, my cousins. Either we were always far from each other or we just drifted away over time.

Touran has three children, my brother, my sister and I.

We are not that close either.

Touran has three grandchildren.

They are, in a way, more French than the French thus communications between them and an Iranian nationalist with Islamic cultural tendencies such as I are few and far in between.

Touran's mother Afsar Vossough Amir-Aalam, my grandmother, died a couple of years before the revolution. Since then the family with the help of the revolution started its irremediable decline. Truth be told the decadence had already begun with the preceding generation, it just gained momentum after my grandmother's love and authority could no longer hold the family together.

Almost everyone in the family and beyond loved and respected her.



Madjid as young polytechnicien

The 11th of November is Touran's birthday.

It is most probably not an accurate date because in those days we did not have a proper "Government Registration Bureau"¹ in Iran and contrary to the European custom our church didn't keep proper records either.

Thus people of Touran's generation, I think post-facto, chose a landmark and easy date to remember. For my mother it was Armistice Day for her eldest sister Iran² it was our New Year's date. For many people it was this religious or that historic date.

Is it important?

Iran spent her last few years in the same "home" with my mother. She was less than two years older. I loved her and she loved me I would say very much especially in her last years when I became her only hope and window on life, "as it used to be".

Iran and Touran were both career women. Touran was naturally more talented and "gifted" but Iran was more successful professionally and socially prominent thus they were always competing, each fighting for what she was missing; Touran for professional and social status and recognition, Iran for charisma and as a role model, both qualities that Touran had and she was missing.

All through their active years Iran was ahead. Most of the time, Touran just accepted and took it in but during Iran's last couple of years at Hotelia³ when Iran's health was failing, Touran, with the help of her elder son took her vengeance in a very cruel way that is special to children and older people.



Iran and Touran, late 1920s Beirut⁴

¹ It is the closest equivalent to Etat Civil in French and Sabt Ahwal in Persian which convey the exact meaning.

² Dr. Iran Aalam was a gynecologist and the first female medical doctor in Iran; she was also active in politics in the "Sazman Zanan" which was the organization fighting for and defending women's rights before the revolution

³ Name of the "home" in Paris

⁴ It is interesting to note how westernized Iran and Touran had become after just a few years abroad. And not only in clothing since they both embraced Christianity

This year no one came to Touran's birthday. There was no birthday.

Except for a short visit from her daughter and from me for a little longer - I had to make the trip all the way from Tehran "worthwhile"!

And of course Mr. Monjazez⁵ who is always faithful and helpful.

Even my elder brother who is the closest among us to our mother didn't come.

Touran didn't mind.

Although she still has her spirits and actually has become a much "nicer" person she doesn't realize whether its a birthday or an ordinary day. She also doesn't know if someone visited her the same day or a year ago. Actually she doesn't know who in the family or among friends and acquaintances is still alive and who is not. It makes it much easier for her.

She is always in a good mood now.

She lives in the present and that she does very well. In some Eastern philosophies this is a great achievement to be strived for at any age.

She still plays the piano and the few chords she can strike I can honestly say she interprets better and especially with more feelings than most of the professional pianists I hear these days. She used to be a "concert level" pianist in her youth and actually wanted to pursue it as a career but in those days Iran was in many ways much more "Islamic" than it is now and she had to follow another professional path.

I sometimes ask my friends traveling to Paris that have never met her to pay her a visit. She enjoys it and so do they. She always makes them feel welcome. She doesn't realize that some of them she has never seen before.

Is it important?

The same day a French family were celebrating their mother's 103rd birthday. Four generations were reunited. I asked them to take a couple of photos. They gracefully accepted and offered me champagne and chocolate; I in turn accepted the first and passed the latter.

It turned out that one of the sons worked and lived with his family in Iran some years during the Shah's time. He was in the pipeline business. They had loved Iran.



⁵ He was a student when my mother was running the "Maison de L'Iran" at the Paris University in the early seventies. He remained a faithful and obliging family friend ever since.

I had a good feeling seeing them happy and talking to them about our country. They were the “Old World” French type, an endangered species in the world and especially in France.

In Persian we say “adam hessabi” which is a better expression because it conveys the same meaning without class connotations.

I thought Touran is still young compared to 103!

Next year, I am going to arrange things so that at least a few people come to her birthday – inchallah.

It always makes her so happy to see people around her and just as important it is also pleasant for those that come.

Touran still has charisma!

Lets hope that we all are all still around next year and maybe see you on November the 11th in Paris?

J-M Houtcieff