

Our Town

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2 SEPTEMBER 1986

Land of the Sunset

Make a Statement
with Clothes

Escape from Iran

\$2.00

CONTENTS

Our Town Volume 1, Issue 2 September 1986

FEATURES

Escape from Iran

Memories of torture and death in an Iranian prison haunt Ruhyyih (pronounced "Roo-hee") Jahanpour's new life in Guelph.

7

Applied Science

...and geography... Developed in Ontario, the MacIntosh apple offers a world of culinary possibilities.

20

Making A Statement With Clothes

A "look" of your own.

25

Inside Guelph's Heritage Homes

Janefield Manor: a bright window on history.

34

Murder at the Supermarket

Can you survive shopping with children?

40

DEPARTMENTS

News

10

Keeping Financially Fit

The bond market

15

Listen Honey

There's one in every office

17

Entrepreneurs

Mona Sorenson of "Churchill's"

18

Excursion

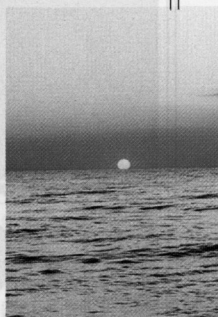
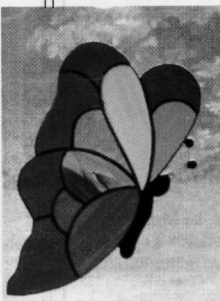
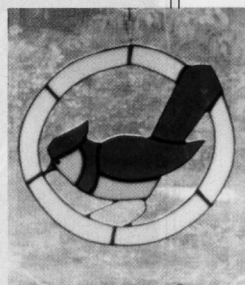
A day-trip to the land of the sunset

23

Group Profile

Guelph reaching out: Guelph International Resource Centre

30





ESCAPE FROM IRAN

Twenty-seven-year-old Ruhiyyih Jahanpour shows me a photograph of her friends. It was taken along the shore of the Persian Gulf. She points to the smiling faces. "She is dead. He died. She died too," she says. "Her name was Shirin. She was my best friend."

Ruhiyyih's friend Shirin was executed in an Iranian prison along with nine other women, the youngest of whom was 16 years old. Ruhiyyih (pronounced Roo-hee) escaped the death penalty and to this day she doesn't understand why.

Petite, dark-eyed and humble, she sits in the livingroom of the small, two-bedroom, Guelph apartment she shares with her mother and sister. Her story is one of persecution, torture, fear and death. Ruhiyyih and her family escaped to Canada in 1984, forced to leave Iran because they were afraid Ruhiyyih would be executed.

Ruhiyyih's crime, and the crime of the 300,000 other Baha'is in Iran is her belief in the teaching of Baha'u'llah, a 19th Century nobleman who preached equality of the sexes and racial harmony. The Baha'is are Iran's largest and most persecuted religious minority. Since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979, almost 200 Baha'is have been executed under the orders of religious leader Ayatolla Khomeini. Ten thousand are homeless, more than 700 are in prison and about 50,000 have fled their homeland.

Living as a Baha'i in Iran means to hide in fear of being imprisoned, tortured executed. Baha'is are not allowed to work or go to school. Because Baha'i marriages are not recognized by law, Baha'i wives are considered prostitutes and their offspring bastards.

It is the goal of Ayatollah Khomeini to kill all Baha'is in Iran, according to Ruhiyyih. He does it methodically, killing only one or two people a week so as not to stir up global protest. Ruhiyyih was there. She witnessed the execution of her family and friends. Her only hope now is to save Baha'is by telling the rest of the world about the horrible murders that take place everyday in Iranian prisons.

"Persecution of the Baha'is is not new," said Ruhiyyih during an interview. "In 1910, my mother's father and grandfather were first shot in the legs and then hanged because they were Baha'is." Her grandfather did not die immediately so they put some sticks under his feet and burned him.

Ruhiyyih and her sister and brother grew up in the city of Shiraz under the relatively tolerant rule of the Shah. She said the situation then wasn't as bad as it is now, although in school other children called Baha'is bastards and teachers made them sit in separate classrooms because they were "najes" (unclean).

When Ruhiyyih was 21, the revolution was taking place in Iran. Soon after she graduated, the Shah was dethroned and all Baha'is under Khomeini's rule were prohibited from going to school.

"I taught for only a few months before I was dismissed," she said. "No one in my family was allowed to work and my father's gas station was confiscated. Around that time, The House of Bab, the most holy Baha'i site in Iran was vandalized

and later completely destroyed. The army also destroyed our local cemetery and desecrated the graves."

Ruhiyyih's first arrest took place Feb 6, 1982. Part of her service to the Baha'i community was to visit imprisoned Baha'is to find out how they were. To get through the prison gates she had to pose as a member of their families. Soon she was being followed frequently by revolutionary guards.

One day a guard stopped me, showed me his identification and his pistol and told me to stand against the wall," she said. "I was forced into a car, blindfolded and taken to a building where I was kept for hours."

"Then the guard took me outside and told me to stand against a tree. I heard his gun click and I thought, 'Now they are going to kill me.' At once I started to pray."

This torture went on for an hour before Ruhiyyih was taken to Seppah Prison. There she was put in a cell about 15 by 21 feet. It had small windows near the ceiling that were covered at all times. The 30 or so women in the cell with Ruhiyyih were all friends and relatives. At times the numbers grew to 100. There was no room to sleep.

"The guards called us infidels," she said. "They didn't allow us to talk to other prisoners. They would say, 'the third floor belongs to the malignant people.'"

Three days after her arrest, Ruhiyyih was interrogated. When she told the interrogator that Baha'is believe in the equality of men and woman, she said he became very angry. He accused her of lying and said that the Baha'is were spies working for other countries. She said he screamed at her, "I will kill you and all Baha'is!"

The interrogation lasted an entire day and night. The following day, Ruhiyyih said she was blindfolded and led to the basement of the prison. There, she was tied to a bed and beaten on the soles of her feet with a wire cable.

"After a few lashes, they stopped to ask if I was a Baha'i and if I would convert (to Muslim) and tell them the names of other Baha'is," said Ruhiyyih. "The lashes were so painful, but I didn't show them I felt pain. I started to pray. Thinking about being a Baha'i made me so strong, but after 20 or 25 lashes I fainted."

When Ruhiyyih regained consciousness, she was given another 54 lashes and then forced to walk back to her cell on her injured feet. The other prisoners washed her wounds and put ointment on them. It was a month before she could walk without pain.

Ruhiyyih was then transferred to an "older, dirtier prison" called Adelabad. In the mouse and cockroach-infested cell there was no heat and meals consisted of watery soup. After ten days, she was taken to court.

"The mullah (judge) leafed through my file, on top of which I saw written, "Baha'i," she said. "He asked if I was Baha'i and when I said I was, he called me foul names. That was all. The whole thing took maybe 15 minutes. Two days later I was suddenly released."

Ruhiyyih had her freedom for only eight months. The next arrest took place at her home. Her best friend, Shirin, who was staying with Ruhiyyih's family was also arrested. They were taken to Seppah prison along with 16 other Baha'i women. After six weeks they were transferred to death row at Adelabad Prison.

"We were put in with thieves, prostitutes and those prisoners condemned to die," she said, "I was there three weeks, when for reasons I still don't understand, they let me go."

Three days later, Komaini's armed guards came to Ruhiyyih's house to arrest her a fourth and final time. She wasn't home. Her parents escaped through a side door when they heard the guards pounding on the door. Their house and all its belongings were confiscated. It was then the Bahai' community decided that Ruhiyyih should leave Shiraz and go to Tehran.

"When I heard from a relative in another city that guards were looking for me there, I realized there wasn't any place in Iran for me to live and serve the community at the same time," said Ruhiyyih. "Three months after my sister, my mother and I escaped, we heard on the radio about the hanging of 10 Baha'i women and six men in Shiraz."

"I felt so empty, as if I had lost my heart. I couldn't talk for several hours," she continued. "I knew that if I had stayed, I would have been killed too."

Ruhiyyih's story has captured the attention of the North American media. Her only hope to save the people of her faith in Iran is to tell the world about Komaini's death-wish for all Baha'is.

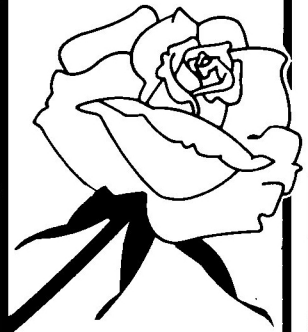
With the help of local Baha'i members Ruhiyyih has been given a chance to speak out against Komaini. *Reader's Digest*, *The Journal* and *People Magazine* have interviewed her. She just returned from a conference in Alabama where she shared the podium with Bernice King, daughter of Martin Luther King. Well-known Canadian musician, Doug Cameron combined forces with Seals and Crofts and Buffy Ste. Marie to make a video called "Mona," who was the youngest of the nine women executed.

As members of the Guelph Baha'i community, Ruhiyyih and her family have found friends who understand and want to help. Recently Ruhiyyih and her sister, 30-year-old Parvin, passed their English proficiency exams. This fall they are studying for their master's degree in Chemistry at the University of Guelph.

When Ruhiyyih talks about Iran, her eyes become full of sadness, yet there is an unmistakable strength about her. She is adjusting to Canadian life. Her dark hair has been lightened a bit. She wears blue jeans and likes to see movies. She and Parvin are looking for jobs.

Will a day come when she will be able to return to her homeland? "I really can't tell you," she said. "What would it be like? Maybe it would be too hard for me going back."

If
COACH
HOUSE
is not YOUR
personal
florist
YOU'RE
MISSING
SOMETHING.



Coach House
Florist offers
Service,
Dependability
and a variety of
Unusual
Arrangements.

COACH HOUSE
FLORIST & GIFTS

30 Baker St.,
(downtown Guelph)
822-3730
open 8:30-6:00