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Searching For Hassan: An American Family's Journey Home To Iran



Synopsis

In 1998 Terence Ward and his family set out on a long-awaited pilgrimage back home -- to the Islamic Republic of Iran, where they lived in the 1960s. Since the fall of the Shah, the country and their past had been effectively sealed off behind a veil of secrecy, and contact with one dear friend in particular, Hassan, had ceased. But memories of life in this enigmatic land -- of cherry orchards and Zoroastrian fire festivals, of the snow-capped Elburz Mountains and Hassan's magical fables--inspired the Wards to return. *SEARCHING FOR HASSAN* is the wondrous and touching story of the Wards' quixotic journey, ultimately rewarded by an emotional reunion with their lost friend. They travel into an unimaginably rich Persian past, to the very origins of civilization, and across the landscape of contemporary Iran, a surreal kaleidoscope of ancient traditions and Western pop culture. Ward creates a vivid portrait of Islam's unique imprint and explores the deep conflicts between Iran and its Arab neighbors, anticipating the new "Great Game" now being played out in central Asia. Ward's keen knowledge of Iranian culture and history, infused with the urgency of his personal journey, reveals a country that is both wildly alien and inextricably linked to the American imagination.

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Customer Reviews

A U.S. State Department warning is usually enough to deter most Americans from traveling to countries in turmoil. But when the mission of the trip was to find a long-lost Iranian named Hassan, not even the inability to obtain visas in the U.S. could stop the Ward family. In 1998, Ward, his parents and three brothers returned to Iran to track down Hassan, a warm, thick-mustached chef

and dispenser of folk wisdom who had looked after their family when they lived in Tehran during the 1960s. Ward skillfully draws readers into his family's state of heightened anticipation, especially since their only tip was the vaguely remembered name of Hassan's hometown. "Toodesht," Ward's mother remembered. "Well, just a minute.... Maybe it was... Tadoosht. Or... Qashtood." Aided by a 30-year-old photograph, the Wards traveled to Tudeshk and eventually found Hassan's mother-in-law, and later, Hassan's wife, Fatimeh, who is so taken aback that she dropped the receiver. Using the trip as his main narrative thread, Ward weaves Iranian history, culture, politics and religion in and around it. The writing stiffens and the pace slows only when Ward reaches back to describe his childhood in Tehran. Ultimately, Ward, a Colorado-based management consultant, succeeds in his loving portrait of a constantly changing, complex land. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Adult/High School-In a prologue set in Tehran in the 1960s, Ward relates how he and his brothers were initiated by the wise Hassan into the mysteries of the Zoroastrian fire festival. But these boys, who so wholeheartedly absorbed their mentor's teachings, were not Iranians but Americans. Returning to the United States, their parents lost touch with Hassan. Iran went through an Islamic revolution, a devastating war with Iraq, and finally another reform movement; the boys grew up and their parents grew older. Yet they never stopped missing Hassan and his family. In 1998, when Iran once more began to admit Westerners, the whole family-four grown men and their now-elderly parents-went back to search for their old friends. Miraculously they did find Hassan-but this is just one aspect of the story. Readers will feel a part of the family, learning how the strengths of each individual contributed to the success of the quest, and the journey is described to striking visual effect, conveying a passion for every experience. As the author reflects on the history, politics, and religion of the country, complex cultural issues become understandable in the light of real human lives. The spiritual lessons learned from Hassan, and new ones gained from new acquaintances, carry the Wards forward as they learn to "look beyond the predicament of politics" to find the "timeless, immutable soul of Iran." An illuminating and fascinating adventure.Christine C. Menefee, Fairfax County Public Library, VA Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

's "Better Together" recommender worked well here: I read "Searching for Hassan" after reading Firoozeh Dumas' charming memoir "Funny in Farsi." Terence Ward's "Hassan" is a compelling read, especially the chapter "Appointment in Tudeshk" which thrillingly recounts the Ward family's reunion with the Ghasemi family after 29 years apart. I'll sheepishly tell you that I skimmed some of

Mr. Ward's erudite sidebars about certain long-ago aspects of Persian history and focused on his more recent accountings of the days of the Shah, the transition to theocratic rule and life since the revolution. But the recounting of the trip itself is pure magic, as are Mr. Ward's remembrances of Hassan and Fatimeh Ghasemi. You can clearly see why these two inspired such devotion from the Ward family. A couple of quick observations: 1. The Iranian people - as a whole - are incredible hosts. As the author notes at one point: "Expect to suffer from excessive hospitality." Never have a people been so misrepresented in the mainstream press. 2. Conventional wisdom to the contrary, the Ward family feels that the Iranian people - as a whole - have fared better under theocratic rule than under the Shah (the poverty witnessed by the author's parents pre-Revolution appears - under observation - to be not as widespread or abject). Again, this is their observation and opinion. 3. You get a sense of the lost opportunity of the reformers. The Wards' trip comes on the heels of the election of the then-Prime Minister Khatami, and the sense of promise is palpable throughout the country. Not without reason, thanks to his good looks, stylishness and Western manners (fluent in English and German, for example), Khatami is described as "our country's JFK." Looking back at this now in 2006 with the reform movement clearly set back in the last election, one can't help but be disheartened. I'm sure the author feels the same way.

Great process of getting the book - I received the book quickly and really enjoyed the story. There is a lot of history that is revealed. Very nice, interesting read.

Fabulous! Purchased on suggestion of a Persian friend. Just sent it to UK where friends there are travelling to Iran in Spring.

This book is exciting, entertaining and engaging. Terence Ward shared his and his family journey back to Iran in the 90's in search of their Iranian family. Details of history, customs, Iranian hospitality and an overland journey make this an exciting book. My family knew the Wards and we were living in Masjid-i-Suliman and Tehran at the same time they were. It was fulfilling to read this historical memoir.

Terence Ward does an excellent job of describing the beautiful Iranian culture in this book. The book consists of part memories, part his travel experiences and most importantly the true culture and history of Iran. I learned more about the history of Iran with this book than any other history book I have ever read. He paints a true picture of Iran without the politics. I strongly recommend this

book to everyone, especially the Iranians or those who have been to Iran. The book brings back all the great memories of the old days.

My wife, son and I traced much of this path, but in the other direction, in 2004. The Ward family's story is heart warming, and the story's imagery brought back beautiful memories of my family's trip, and the occasional tear. Very nicely done.

I really liked it and keep introducing to every one.it's a brief look at the culture and people of Iran. They feel it even better than my own daughter who is Iranian.Good job.

Great book

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