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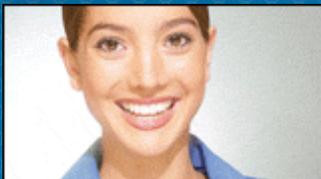
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### Motorcycle trek through Iran enlightens travelers

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(Patrick Zeller/Special to the Express-News)

Riding a rented motorcycle through Iran, Patrick Zeller stops to ask a lone Iranian on a motorbike to snap a photo on a beautiful road between Shiraz and Isfahan.

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## Patrick Zeller Special to the Express-News

A motorcycle trip to Iran? Why would anybody want to do that?

"If you're looking for adventure, why not go visit the West Side?" retorted a few of my Mexican American friends, upon hearing my intention. They were half-joking, of course, but their faces displayed deep concern. "Don't worry," I told them, "everything will be fine."

"Hey, when you're over there," they continued to joke, "ask them why do they wear that Pizza-Hut tablecloth on their head."

I just shook my head.

I found out about the trip by chance after someone placed a copy of Ride Texas Magazine on my office chair. Inside was an ad announcing MotoDiscovery's first-ever trip to Iran. Starting and ending in Istanbul, the goal was to fly to eastern Turkey, unload the motorcycles from a semi-truck and then ride across the border, making a 3,000-mile loop over 15 days through most of Iran's populated areas. "Be part of this vanguard trip to ancient Persia," the ad said. To my surprise I felt a rush of urgency to call the number.

"This is awesome," was my immediate reaction.

I blurted out the idea to my supervisor.

"That's a death wish," he replied, speculating that I wouldn't really be serious about something this crazy.

But he was wrong. I bought the ticket and now I was going to take the ride.

I had been interested in the Middle East since I took a college class in the late '80s about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. I've kept up with the news over there ever since, and my interest expanded to include the whole Middle East and the wider Muslim world. Now this son of a Washington, D.C., oil lobbyist would finally have a chance to see this oil-rich nation for the first time up close and on a motorcycle, no less.

I love to ride. The previous summer I took a solo motorcycle trip from San Antonio to Vancouver, B.C. and back — that's 8,000 miles over 26 days. The experience made me a more confident rider and gave me a craving for adventure travel. But I went on that trip primarily to clear my head after my father's suicide in February 2005. Among other things he was depressed after losing both his wife and his daughter to cancer,

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The second 'Iran Recon Ride' is on. Book your trip now at [MotoDiscovery.com](#) if you dare. 'Everything will be fine.'

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which brings me to my next reason to go to Iran: life is short and ... there's nobody left to tell me I can't go. I'm not married and I don't have any kids.

Frankly, many of my fears of risk-taking were beginning to disappear. But would it be foolish to go to Iran, to intentionally put myself in harm's way?

My brother David told me, "Watch your back," and "Don't let them take you," referring to my impending abduction by crazed *jihadis*. The news seemed to be getting worse and worse as our departure date grew closer. There were deadly attacks between Kurdish rebels and Turkish forces in eastern Turkey, and a bird-flu outbreak in the same area that left three children dead. My scheduled Delta flight was in jeopardy due to a threatened pilot walkout. Then there was an earthquake in Iran near our intended route that left 80 dead.

America was becoming increasingly unpopular due to its invasion of Iran's neighbor and its support of Israel's occupation in Palestine. And to cap it all off, the Bush administration's rhetoric was at a fever pitch over Iran's nuclear enrichment program, with talk of surgical airstrikes, regime change, U.N. sanctions and, at one point, all but ruling out the use of a small nuclear weapon against Iran's nuclear research facilities. Facilities that, to my amazement, I would later ride past on my motorcycle.

"Don't read the news," was what the small travel agency in Tehran kept telling us. "Everything's fine here." Another reassuring detail was that our tour organizer and the founder of MotoDiscovery, Skip Mascorro of Spring Branch, along with Kazim Uzunoglu, our Turkish coordinator with Kazoom Moto-Adventures, would be accompanying us into Iran.

Although they had never traveled to Iran before, Skip maintained that, despite all the troubling news reports in the U.S. media, "All indications are that the people are extremely welcoming, are by nature friendly and are as curious of Western ways as we are certain to be about theirs. Graciousness is inherent."

They also sent out a flier to the 13 Americans who signed up for the "Iran Recon Ride" warning us about hyped U.S. news of the Middle East and of listening to comments by uninformed friends who might try to convince us that Iran was dangerous and talk us out of leaving. But in the end Skip kept telling us that he'd pull the plug if things looked bad.

Well, it did look bad, and no one was going to pull the plug. Armed with my duffle filled with motorcycle gear and my recently arrived visa stamped "Islamic Republic of Iran," I boarded a plane to take me from New York to Istanbul, where my adventure begins ...

### **From Eurasia to the Middle East**

Turkey is the first Muslim country I've ever visited. There I meet the other riders, none of whom I've ever met before, at a hotel in the shadow of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul's old city. With the exception of Kazim, our Turkish coordinator, it looks like I'm the group's youngest member.

"This is my first international motorcycle trip," I tell them. They all laugh.

"You're starting at the top," Kazim jokes. "Everything after this will seem boring to you."

He's right. After dinner I go out solo for a walk around the mosques and the famous Grand Bazaar. I share a cigarette with a young Kurdish guy. He takes me to a Turkish barbershop where I receive a shave with a straight razor. We go out for a beer and tell stories. I have a döner kebab on the street with a cold glass of ayran, a yogurt drink.

After a three-hour flight to Van in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated East, the group unloads the bikes from a tractor-trailer that carries the rented motorcycles from the BMW dealer in Istanbul.

At a hotel under Turkey's highest peak, Mount Ararat, where Noah's Ark is supposed to be, the group shares their last drink of beer. There will be no alcohol allowed for the next 15 days. During the five-hour wait at the Turkey/Iran border, while the bikes are being sprayed for bird flu, I watch Iranian "Tom and Jerry" cartoons on the TV that feature female characters wearing the *hijab*.

Once across the border, the first Iranian we meet is at the petrol station. Noticing our motorcycles and protective suits, the man asks us in Farsi if we are the international police. Gary, who had actually practiced some Farsi beforehand, enthusiastically greets the man with a hearty "Shalom!"

I quickly get between the two, correcting Gary's gaffe with a jutting "Salaam! salaam ... Salaam aliekum." (Peace be with you).

We make it to our first major city, Tabriz, a mountain city the size of San Antonio, in rainy weather during rush hour. I'm doing 70 mph on the centerline with a group of teens to my right at full throttle, trying to get a look at our motorcycles. The bumper sticker on their car says in English, "The need for speed."

The next morning, over freeze-dried Nescafe, sheep's yogurt, flatbread, honeycomb, feta cheese and olives, I ask Kazim if we can arrange for my own room after my roommate, Chris, does push-ups beside my bed at 5 a.m.

"At first I thought Allah sent Chris to me to test my patience," I explain to Kazim, feeling that somehow I've failed. "I will arrange this," Kazim somberly admits, "because I would not want to be in your shoes."

Allah akbar! (God is great.)

Road conditions in Iran are quite good, the tarmac is free of potholes and any debris is regularly swept by hand. At times Kazim is going 100 mph. Three members of our group get lost after missing a crucial turn. Murat, our Turkish camera man, has a GPS and finds an alternate route, but Bernie gets pulled over by the cops, then back-tracks to look for the missed turn. (The basic rule of thumb if you see someone getting

stopped by the police in Iran is, "DON'T STOP!" It'll be easier to get out of jail if at least one person is still loose on the outside.) After some hand wringing, and with no way to contact him, Bernie miraculously arrives at the hotel in Ardebil four hours late by following a cab driver.

I light a cigarette outside our hotel after arriving in the Caspian Sea port of Kyrashahr. Young teenage boys on motorbikes try to impress me by doing wheelies in the street. Their bikes are rigged with a popular computer-chip horn that makes unusual sounds to attract the attention of young girls. Not knowing each other's language, we can still communicate with hand gestures, mime and laughter.

After a meal, a few of the riders take the motorcycles down to the beach to witness the Caspian Sea at night. We park the bikes next to the smaller Iranian ones at the teahouse. The teens I met earlier are waiting for me, eager to escort me over the swamp to the beach. When we arrive they pause to leave me alone, allowing me to put my hands in the water and contemplate the full moon and the sea.

The other riders are talking to a woman who explains how male and female bathers are separated at the beach. The youths soon yank me away from the shore to show me more stuff. I pull an Iranian *rial* from my pocket that displays the late Ayatollah's face on it. One of the boys pull it from my hand pointing at the image, "mullaha-mullaha," he says, twirling his finger over his head making an imaginary turban while pulling his other hand over his chin, indicating a long beard. "The mullahs," I say, and the boy nods holding his hands to his throat as if choking himself. I nod, the mullahs are choking them.

The other teen wraps an imaginary headscarf over his face. "The women," I say, and he crosses his fists at the wrist to indicate hands bound in shackles. He was the one who was doing wheelies earlier. I circle my finger while pointing at my ear, "crazy." They all laugh and slap my back nudging and touching me as we make our way back to the teahouse. "USR! USR!" they yell. They cannot pronounce the letter A.

At the teahouse the Islamic police are unhappy and want to know whose motorcycles are these. Skip tells them to go to the hotel where the desk is holding our passports. Within 10 minutes the mayor of this town of 40,000 is greeting us with his entourage as we smoke *hookahs*.

"What is your position?" he asks sternly through a translator. We look at each other. Henry gets up and hugs the mayor, which best explains our position on Iran. We all laugh and stand and smile and take pictures. The mayor suggests that we be guests at his home for a "real" drink. We graciously decline, not wanting to risk trouble. The mayor pays for our tea and *hookahs*.

### **A long way from home**

After four days of experiencing the strange traffic situation in Iran, the group is anxious and a little nervous about the ride into the center of Iran's capital, Tehran. We pass from the Caspian through Iran's highest snow-capped mountains that loom over this

city of 12 million people. The police pull us off the main highway as we get into the city limits; large motorbikes like ours are not available in Iran, and most Iranians are only allowed 125cc motorbikes, a little larger than a moped. Kazim tries to explain that our 650 and 1200cc motorcycles can go faster than the flow of traffic. He speaks to the officer in Turkish, but people this far inland have more trouble understanding. We have to wait for our Iranian guide, Mr. Nashat, who is with his driver, Mr. Hussein, in a van with our luggage. But rules are rules and we're escorted to a smaller side road, but chaos ensues and soon the group begins to break apart.

Finally the police see the problem and relent, escorting us back to the main highway, and we are on our way.

Tehran's traffic seems crazy compared to our way of driving in the U.S. But if you understand a few concepts, you'll find that traffic flow actually works pretty well in Iran. The rules of the road are as follows: traffic on the left side of the road is coming at you and on the other side going with you, generally speaking. That's the only thing resembling a rule that I can see. Kazim best explains the basic philosophy behind driving in the Middle East.

"In the West," he says, "it's customary to yield." In the East, the common mindset is to take. In other words, if there is any space at all in front of you while driving, you must fill it. Not only fill the space, but take it with confidence and assertiveness so that there is no confusion as to your intentions in the minds of the surrounding motorists. It's also customary to use your horn, turn signals, accelerator, and to flash your high beams to communicate.

Ultimately, however, the most important factor in riding a motorcycle safely through Iran's urban areas is to TRUST the Iranians. It takes a few days of riding among them for the trust to develop, but Iranians have eyes in the back of their head and are quite used to motorcycle traffic swirling around them. In the end, I found motorcycle riding there much safer than in San Antonio.

Kazim decides to interview me in front of the tower in Azadi Square in Tehran's center. Thousands gathered here during Iran's revolution in 1979. Murat videotapes me for a documentary on our ride.

"Why did you want to come on this trip?" they ask, the camera rolling. After giving them some standard answer, I found myself mentioning my family almost spontaneously. While acknowledging my sister and my parents, I simultaneously felt their presence as if they were right there with me. It happened in a split second, like a flash as I talked. Suddenly, I couldn't believe I was standing here in the middle of Tehran so far from home. I took a risk to come here, maybe even a foolish risk. It felt like their hands were on my shoulders and pushing me forward. I am the one who is still living, I thought.

"We're proud of you," I could hear them saying. I could see Kazim and Murat staring at me. They had no idea where I just was.

The motorcycles were a natural icebreaker between us and the people anywhere we

went. I saw children run out of their houses and do a little jig by the side of the road as we rode by. "Motos!" they would shout. Teens on motorbikes would ride alongside us as we'd enter a village. By the time we'd reach the center of town their numbers would double, creating quite a challenge at the traffic circle. A crowd of men and boys would always form whenever we stopped. Since I was among the youngest in our group many of them would gather around me after I'd removed my helmet.

Most of the faces are young. Up to 70 percent of Iran is under the age of 30, a reminder of the terrible cost in lives the Iranians paid during their eight-year war with their neighbor Iraq in the '80s, a war in which the United States government supported its enemy, a million dead on both sides. But this new generation didn't seem to hold this against me.

"How much does it cost?" "How fast does it go?" "How many gears?" "What is your job?" "How much do you make?" they would ask. And, of course, "Where are you from?"

"America," I would tell them in as humble a voice as I could. "America?" they would answer in surprise. They were thinking I was either German or French.

Before the Shah fell in the 1979 revolution, Iranians were used to having Americans living and working among them doing business and making money. Many in this generation developed lasting friendships and learned English during that time. They seemed to look back fondly on those times when relations seemed good between the United States and Iran.

### **Behind the headlines**

Flying down the highway in the desert 100 miles south of Tehran, I'm stunned by the majestic view of the snowy mountains directly in front of me. The riders are far from each other. I notice a large smokestack about 1,000 meters to my right. It's a busy industrial plant with an official-looking gate. There's an anti-aircraft gun protected by a mound of earth near the road. It's manned. Looking around I can see maybe 50 similar mounds dotted around the facility in a wide radius. I slow down expecting to be stopped while I check the map on my tank-bag. To my amazement, it's the nuclear research facility at Natanz! This site is supposedly the main plant for the study of uranium enrichment in Iran. There's no checkpoint and I'm not asked to stop.

A motorcycle tour like ours is an unusual sight in Iran. I would expect them to wonder what we're doing here. I want to stop and take a photo but am afraid it'll look like I'm up to something. I keep going. A few miles down the road is the turn-off to the 2,000-year-old mountain village of Abyaneh where we'll be spending the night. There's another anti-aircraft gun overlooking the corner. As I make my turn I wave to the gunner. He gives me an enthusiastic wave back, his hand high over his head.

At the village hotel the head woman serves up tea and rice and a bowl of *gaimeh* (lamb and split peas with tomatoes). She offers to Carol and Ann that they can remove their headscarves while at dinner. "This is our hotel. You are free here." But her own

headscarf remains on her head as is her custom.

We finally make it across the desert to Yazd in a heavy crosswind. The bikes have to lean into the wind at a steep angle for hours. There are large cargo trucks sharing the road. They flash their high beams at us in approval and honk. Ironically the horns on large trucks here sound like a person whistling loudly through two fingers, whereas horns on cars and motorbikes sound more like a Mack truck.

"That was absolutely dreadful," says Carol in her New Zealand accent as we arrive at Yazd's main bazaar. Our hotel is actually inside the bazaar with the rooms facing a large courtyard with a fountain and divans and pillows to sit on. The courtyard is popular at night with the locals smoking *hookahs* and drinking tea. Three young men are sitting talking on their cell phones as I walk past, exhausted, to my room. One of the boys stops me.

"Please excuse me," he says, "but Bush is a terrorist." I smile back at them while the other boys laugh nervously at their friend. I go to my room and remove my clothes and collapse into bed. I can't stop thinking about the boy's comment. I turn on the light, put my clothes back on and return to the boys in the courtyard. They make room on the divan for me and offer me food and a smoke.

We talk for hours about our societies while they continue to receive cell phone calls every minute. One of them asks me if I have any U.S. coins for his collection. Earlier in the day, I spoke with some young soldiers doing their two-year compulsory service. These soldiers, who learned some English in the military, said that serving in the army will give them a chance at better job opportunities later in life. But when I asked the cell-phone boys, who appeared to be the same age as the soldiers, "Have you performed your two-year compulsory service?" they shot me a look that said they had not and that it's a touchy subject. These boys probably will not serve in the army as is required and did not appear to be worried about any missed job connections in the future.

### **Into the bizarre**

Yazd is a Zoroastrian city. Most of ancient Persia was Zoroastrian for thousands of years until the rise of Mohammed and the spread of Islam in the 600s. Our Iranian guide, Mr. Nashat, says there are around 7,000 Zoroastrians in Yazd today. "The invading Muslim armies could not cross the desert to Yazd," he explains to us. "So the Zoroastrians of Yazd sent a representative to meet and pay them to leave Yazd alone." This worked, and Yazd was able to remain Zoroastrian, unlike other Persian cities, for many more years until finally the Muslims took the city. The Zoroastrians then moved their fire temples to exile in India, where many remain today. But many later returned to Yazd, where at the temple we are visiting, the flame still burns and is tended to by one of their priests.

I watch the priest through a glassed-in enclosure stoke a large pot of burning logs. This fire, they claim, has been burning continuously for about 1,700 years.

Yazd stands out among other large cities in Iran. The wind towers are the most

distinguishing feature on its skyline and are an ancient form of natural air conditioning. These tall, rectangular towers have a well dug beneath them. As the air passes through the vents at the top, it draws air into the shaft toward the cooler air in the well. As the air travels down the shaft it increases in velocity, where it gets forced into a system of pipes that are connected to the surrounding buildings. Nobody knows when the first "windcatcher" was invented but some that are still in use are centuries old. They are everywhere in Yazd and are still being built today.

Zoroastrians, like some tribes in Tibet, left their dead on the mountaintop to be picked away by carrion birds. Just outside the city of Yazd are two cylindrical towers, one for men and one for women, built into two adjacent mountains. I climb to the top of one of these towers to see a deep well in the center that is now filled with earth. Loved ones would say goodbye to their dead while standing in a circle around the body, which lay over a grate. The bones, picked away by birds, would fall into the well. Each tower contains the bodies of millions of people over thousands of years. Zoroastrians believe that the body can contaminate the ground if buried. Modern-day Zoroastrians have compromised with the Iranian authorities to have their dead lay in sealed concrete sarcophagi.

### **Close calls**

The most dangerous part of traveling through Iran by motorcycle is the motorcycle ride itself. There were several close calls that were usually due to careless mistakes that either my fellow riders or I experienced or saw. The worst for me was in a village on the way to Hamadan. The group was traveling very fast and I found myself at times scrambling to keep up so as not to miss that crucial turnoff. I saw Kazim had already made his turn but I was already far behind, my path blocked by a large dump truck that had just cut in front of me. I tried to pass it on the right, which is never a good idea no matter what country you're in. I immediately saw my mistake, as there was a metal sign in a bucket of cement announcing in Farsi that the road had ended due to construction. With no time to react, I hit the signpost squarely, knocking off two turn signals and breaking both my middle toes on my shifting-foot. I managed not to fall; no one noticed what I'd done, and the group continued. I chased after them until we finally came to a stop 50 miles down the road. I was furious with Kazim for going so fast, although it was really my fault. My toes became blackened. Kazim gave me some anti-inflammatory cream and some Neosporin. I would have to plod on at a limp for the second half of the trip.

On the way into Yazd, Bernie blew the main gasket on his bike. The men at the hotel helped us find a mechanic and Skip and Bernie spent the evening trying to repair it but to no avail. The hotel offered to keep the bike with them until we were ready to hire a truck to haul it to the border on the day we were ready to cross. Skip gave up his motorcycle for Bernie to use and volunteered to ride in the van with Mr. Nashat for the remainder of the trip.

Too bad because the ride through Persepolis and Shiraz on the way to Isfahan is spectacular. There are snowy mountains and deep river gorges with wildflowers blooming in green valleys. It's Friday and once again families are out having a picnic after visiting the mosque. I pull over to take a photo and people offer me tea and dates

and their local candy, called *gaz*. Chris loses his tail-bag and I see it bouncing down the highway. He doesn't realize and I stop and pick it up. Fifty miles up the road I see him stopped at the turnoff cursing at his empty bungee straps. I stop and watch him for a while, then hand him his gear.

Isfahan is considered by most Iranians, and even worldwide, to be one of the most beautiful cities in all the Middle East. Situated in a wide river basin below the mountains, it has a mild climate and green tree-lined streets. Many ancient bridges span the river. The intricate tile work on the mosques are perfectly intact and are more preserved than in other parts of Iran because earthquakes have spared this city. There are many universities here and I quickly meet some professors on the street who are eager to interview an American.

"I don't know if I'll have time," I tell Ali, a linguistics professor. But fate would have it that we bump into each other again the following day. We agree to meet at a teahouse. As we enter, I am invited to choose a parrot to sit on my shoulder while I join Ali shoeless on the divan for a *hookah* and tea. Ali is still unmarried at age 35, which is reaching the point of being too old. He asks me my advice on meeting women.

"Please don't ask my advice," I plead, but he's persistent. "I may have to leave Iran to find a wife," he says.

There are many protocols to cover for a man and a woman to meet in Iran, many involving the woman's parents and marriage. Ali spent some time studying in London and had an aversion to all the formalities involved — formalities that are perhaps potentially embarrassing for him given his age.

"I don't know what to do about my future life," Ali groans. "It is a case of Catch-22. These days I am tired of my colleagues' sarcastic remarks about my being single. They are detestable; they are nauseating, rustic, uncouth. They scoff at me, jeer at me, use biting language, they tell me, 'You are enjoying beautiful girls, you are a womanizer, you are not married.'"

"Perhaps they're just jealous," I tell him. "The irony is that in my country my childless, unmarried status is met with envy."

A conversation about President Bush leads to a discussion about Armageddon and American Christians.

"Muslims believe in an Armageddon at which point Christ returns — it's in the Quran," Ali offers.

"Really? I was not aware of that," I tell him.

"Does Bush ever mention Armageddon in his speeches?"

"No, but some of his supporters speak of it," I say.

"When do they predict this Armageddon will take place?"

"Preferably within their own lifetimes, I imagine," I say, smiling.

Ali laughs. "Of course."

At breakfast Mr. Hussein asks me in Farsi about my health. I grab my stomach: "So-so, ate some bad eggplant a few days ago." Mr. Hussein doesn't speak any English. He pushes a bowl of sheep's yogurt toward me while patting his stomach.

We pass another two nuclear research facilities on the way up to Takab, a small sheep-herding village near Hamadan. At the hotel CNN is reporting that Bush can't rule out the use of a small nuclear device against Iran's nuclear facilities. The next day the price of gas in Turkey goes from \$8 to \$10 per gallon. Meanwhile gas in Iran is still 37 cents.

The young woman working at the hotel is home helping her parents during her break from the university in Tehran. She looks like she'd rather not be here in Takab. Henry asks her about wearing the headscarf. She explains that she would prefer not to wear it but that it's not a big deal to her.

"It's like the sign on the door at McDonald's in America," she explains. "No shirt, no shoes, no service. You just do it and there's no problem."

Without us asking she offers a picture of life in Tehran. People have alcohol in their homes; there are drugs, too. It's everywhere. She can get away with having a boyfriend over to her apartment.

### **End of the journey**

We're back on the road after visiting an ancient Zoroastrian palace on a lake filling a now-extinct volcano. As we arrive in our final city of Urimiyeh near the border crossing with Turkey, two men meet us with the truck carrying the broken motorcycle. I take a photo as the men change a flat tire on the truck. The owner of the 10-story hotel in Urimiyeh was able to build it with money he earned working at a convenience store in the U.S.

It's a three-hour wait at the border and the authorities offer us tea and cookies while we wait to be processed. Mr. Abbas, our Kurdish driver on the other side, waits to meet the Iranian truck. He's removed the seats in his van to make room for the broken motorcycle. Kazim counts out a stack of *tumans* and *rials* to pay Mr. Nashat and Mr. Hussein. Each of us kisses them three times on the cheek. The group has pooled some extra money together to give them a tip. After crossing back into Turkey, Carol and Ann have a little ceremony as they remove their headscarves.

Mr. Abbas insists we have a large lunch at his Kurdish village in the snowy mountains. It's 35 degrees outside and I'm wearing everything I have. Turkish armored personnel

carriers and jeeps share the road with us on the way. The fog is so thick at the top of the mountain that I cannot see three feet in front of me. Abbas' daughters are all dressed in their finest Kurdish dresses as we arrange ourselves on the floor among colorful rugs and pillows. His wife has taken three days to prepare this meal and everyone agrees that it's the best meal we've had on the trip. Yogurt soup with meatballs, lamb stew, chicken, rice, dolmas, bread and tea.

After a long flight back to San Antonio via Istanbul and New York, I watch a plump kid wearing a Dale Earnhart NASCAR T-shirt, munch on a bag of Cheetos. My cab driver pauses to look at the maps of Turkey and Iran on my tank-bag as he loads my gear into the cab.

"Do you work for the CIA?"

"No," I say, and he doesn't believe me. He's from Algeria and speaks Arabic. Suddenly I feel right at home.

The next day, I meet up with my friends. "They didn't have any Pizza Hut tablecloths," I say. I present them a real kaffiya headscarf. They offer me a real beer.

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*Patrick Zeller is a freelance illustrator living in San Antonio and spent the past 12 years as a news graphic artist at the San Antonio Express-News. He can be reached at [pzeller@satx.rr.com](mailto:pzeller@satx.rr.com).*

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