

Boars, Bazaars and Bugging Out

A Memoir of American Families in Iran: 1975-1979

SANDRA KELTON PITTS



HELLGATE PRESS

ASHLAND, OREGON

BOARS, BAZAARS AND BUGGING OUT
©2013 SANDRA KELTON PITTS

Published by Hellgate Press
(An imprint of L&R Publishing, LLC)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information and retrieval systems without written permission of the publisher.

Hellgate Press
PO Box 3531
Ashland, OR 97520
email: info@hellgatepress.com

Editors: Patricia Kot, Harley B. Patrick
Cover Design: L. Redding

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pitts, Sandra Kelton.

Boars, bazaars and bugging out : a memoir of American families in Iran, 1975-1979 / Sandra Kelton Pitts. -- First edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-55571-733-9

1. United States. Air Force--Officers--Biography. 2. Military dependents--United States--Biography. 3. Americans--Iran--Biography. 4. Iran--History--Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 1941-1979. 5. Iran--History--Revolution, 1979. 6. Martial law--Iran--History--20th century. I. Title.

UG626.P49 2013

355.1'20973--dc23

2013026079

Printed and bound in the United States of America
First edition 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

The Contributors	vii
Introduction	ix
Cast of Characters	xi
CHAPTER ONE: We Are Going Where?	1
CHAPTER TWO: Getting Ready and Getting There	17
CHAPTER THREE: Iran: The Far Side of the World	29
CHAPTER FOUR: Our Homes	39
CHAPTER FIVE: Our Neighborhoods: “Kuche” Coo	55
CHAPTER SIX: Geography	77
CHAPTER SEVEN: Driving in Iran	87
CHAPTER EIGHT: Some Culture Shock	123
CHAPTER NINE: Social Life	165
CHAPTER TEN: Kids and Schools	195
CHAPTER ELEVEN: Food	209
CHAPTER TWELVE: Down Country	227
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Travel in Iran	267
CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Beginning of the Unrest	291
CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Bugging Out	323
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: After the Bug-Out	351
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: Final Thoughts and Reflections	403
Acknowledgments	413
References	415
About the Author	419

The Contributors

“Round up the usual suspects.” — *Casablanca* (1942)

- Bauman, Barbara A., wife of Robert Bruce Bauman, Maj. USAF (Ret.)
Bauman, Robert Bruce, Maj. USAF (Ret.)
Beckman, Marilyn Jean McHale, wife of Rodney B. Beckman, Col. USAF (Ret.)
Blocher, Bruce K., Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)
Broerman, Peggy, wife of Ramon K. Broerman, Col. USAF (Ret.)
Broerman, Ramon K., Col. USAF (Ret.)
Day, Evelyn S., wife of David A. Day, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)
Johnson, Janet, widow of Glenn E. Johnson, Lt. Col. USAF, MSC (Ret.)
Lyman, James B., Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)
Pedersen, Patti, wife of Larry Pedersen, Maj. USAF (Ret.)
Pitts, Earl W., Col. USAF (Ret.)
Scheck, Michele M., wife of Ron Scheck, Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)
Secord, JoAnn, wife of Richard Secord, Maj. Gen. USAF (Ret.)
Shuler, Dwight M., Lt. Col. USAF (Ret.)
Strickland, P. Clark, ex-wife of James Noel Strickland, Lt. Col. USAF (deceased)

Introduction

Like the novels of Charles Dickens, this book is peopled by an astonishing array of characters, real people who share their tales of living in Iran in their own words as they reveal, as authors, their individual quirks and fancies while reacting to life in a land so unlike their own—Iran. This, then, is “A Tale of Two Countries,” sometimes melodramatic, perhaps, but a truer historical reconstruction of what happened in Iran from 1975 to 1979 than Dickens’ not-so-accurate reconstruction of London and Paris during the period of the French Revolution (1789-1799). Dickens published *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859 from a view looking back in time, sixty years after that revolution. His was a romanticized portrayal of a revolutionary period in which he did not live. The authors of this book did not need to fictionalize their stories; they lived them.

Analogous, maybe, to the citizens of Paris who stormed the Bastille on July 14, 1789, the authors of this book, along with thousands of other Americans (45,000 by 1978), stormed the culture of the ancient country of Iran and found themselves not to be revolutionaries, but rather sponges who absorbed and eventually embraced the people of a nation whom they lived among and learned to respect, even love.

This book, like Dickens’ tale, has been written many years after another revolution—actually just over thirty years after we authors all “bugged out.” But none of us has been forced to rely upon second-hand resources, as Dickens did. Military families seem to have “pack-rat” genes because we are always faced with the possibility of an immediate transfer to another base/post anywhere in the world. We who wrote this book have kept *original* documentation of everything about our tours in Iran: letters to family in the U.S. written from Iran, photos, medical records, travel orders, chil-

dren's schooling history, household goods shipping manifests, etc. Some of us completed the two-year tour while others' tours were terminated early by the forced evacuation, especially of dependent wives and children, when the Iranian revolution gripped the country.

What follows, then, is a list of who we are (were), our families, our pets, and when we arrived in Iran for a two-year assignment—starting with the Lymans, the earliest to arrive. In each chapter, you will hear from multiple individuals, in their own words.

At the beginning of this memoir, the writers of this book expressed that, surely, the Iran assignment was “the worst of times” in their career military tours. After just a relatively short adjustment period, however, the Iran experience became “the best of times.” Unfortunately, by the end of 1978, our tour became, once again, “the worst of times.” Many of us rotated out before martial law was declared in September 1978, while others left later in fear for their lives. The Iranians we'd come to know so well—the colleagues with whom we worked and the friends and neighbors we cherished—were forced to stay behind and meet the scourges of revolution: the reality of executions for the high-ranking personnel and the hopeless suppression of the masses.

It is my hope that by the time you finish the final chapter, you will come to know us as individuals and understand better just what our Iran experience meant to us and how it shaped our lives.

Cast of Characters

Major James (Jim) Lyman*, wife Yvonne, children: Geoffrey (16), Jennifer (12), Bruce (9) [June 1975]

B. Gen. Richard (Dick) Secord, wife JoAnn*, children: Julie (12), twins John and Laura (7) [September 1975]

Col. Earl (Snake) Pitts*, wife Sandy*, no accompanying children [August 1976]

Major Noel Strickland (now deceased), wife Patricia Clark*, children: Shelton (14), Steve (11), Missy (10), dog: Trill (Lhasa apso) [Nov. 1976]

Capt. Bruce Bauman*, wife Barbara*, children: Amy (7), Wendy (3) [Nov. 1976]

Lt. Col. Glenn Johnson (now deceased), wife Janet*, no accompanying children, dog: Gomer (black poodle) [Dec. 1976]

Major David Day, wife Evelyn*, children: Michelle (12), Cara (11), Melissa (10), Michael (7), Dog: Samantha (Sam) (husky & poodle mix) [Dec. 1976]

Major Ramon Broerman*, wife Peg*, children: Scott (16), Kevin (15), Megan (6) [Jan. 1977]

Col. Rodney (Rod) Beckman, wife Marilyn (Micki)*, children: Kaille (18), Michael (16), Shawn (14), Patrick (12) [Jan. 1977]

Major Larry Pedersen, wife Patti*, children: Mark (9), Lisa (7) [May 1977]

Major Ron Scheck, wife Michele*, children: Stephanie (4 ½), Lorie (1 ½) [May 1977]

Major Bruce Blocher*, unaccompanied one-year tour [May 1977]

Major Dwight Shuler*, wife Barbara, children: Dwight Jr. (Rusty) (11), Norman (Chris) (7), Cats: Ta Se (Thai for 'blue eyes') (Siamese), Lemon Drop (alley cat) [June 1978]

**The individual family member who contributed to this book.*

CHAPTER ONE

“We’re Going Where?”

The Lymans

It all began in the magnificent Northwest at Spokane, Washington. From 1971 to 1974 I was assigned as the Curriculum Director for the Air Force World-Wide Survival School program, headquartered at Fairchild AFB. We loved it. And I never had so much fun. Got to crawl around the jungles of Panama and the Philippines, camp in minus 58-degree weather in Alaska, swim with the sharks in Florida, and chase bears riding the skids of Huey helicopters in the wilds of northern Idaho and Washington. And for this they even paid me.

Then we got the dream assignment of a lifetime: I was being assigned as the Education Advisor to the Greek Air Force. Three years, accompanied by the family, in Athens. Wow! After three months of giddy excitement came the crushing news that the assignment was cancelled. Ouch. Then came selection to Air Command and Staff College, certainly a very good thing for the career. But Alabama, instead of Athens? My girl was not happy. We decided that no matter what Maxwell was like, we would hate it. (And I being a died-in-the-wool, card-carrying Southerner, no less.)

Predictably, we hated it and had trouble understanding why some reasonably well adjusted and intelligent folks really liked it down there. Half-way through the year (1974-75), it dawned on us that we were living a self-

fulfilling prophecy. We came predisposed to hate Alabama and, sho-nuff, y'all, we did. We vowed never to do that again and swore that no matter what happened in the future, we would look to the bright side.

The call from the Air Force personnel folks with the news of the Iran assignment included the alleged good news that this was a hand-select deal, and that I should be thrilled at the opportunity. Actually, it sounded interesting and gave us a shot at a consecutive tour to Europe. (That actually happened, and we ended up with follow-on *hardship* tours to Germany and the south of Italy. Only for our country!) I was to be the Executive Officer to the Technical Assistance Field Team Commander (TAFT). We were the troops who actually provided the hands-on, day-to-day advice to the Iranian Air Force. We had various teams assigned to Tehran and at down-country Imperial Iranian Air Force (IIAF) bases.

Yvonne's initial reaction is reflected in the title to this part of the tale: "We are going WHERE?." But the girl was a trooper, and we launched for Iran with three kids, all in high spirits and with high hopes. And as the next two and one-half years progressed, justifiably so. We went, determined to like it, and did. So much so that we extended a twenty-four-month tour into two and a half years, June 1975-January 1978. Supposedly, I was the first military officer in the history of the mission to extend.

The Secords

In February 1975, Dick was transferred to Selma, Alabama. He had to get checked out in the F-5 fighter plane, plus some other things, so the kids and I stayed in Alexandria, VA, until the end of June when he was finished.

We got to Selma and I loved being on a base again, but Dick hated it and was bored. I guess after three years at the Pentagon, it was a little too quiet for him. He had to make a couple of trips in August back to the Pentagon, which really blew up all the skirts there at Selma because no one was ever "called" to the Pentagon.

Anyway, on Tuesday, September 9, 1975, he called me in the morning at the house and said, "I have some really good news and some bad news." Well, of course, my heart dropped down to my feet. I said, "Give me the good news first." "I have been transferred to Tehran, Iran—immediately," he replied. "What do you mean immediately?" I asked. "Well, I have to

leave here (Selma) by next Monday, Tuesday the latest.” “What is the bad news?” I asked. “You and the kids can stay here while I go ahead, find housing, etc.” he answered. That did not go over too well with me. I told him, “No way. You go—I and the kids go with you, period.” End of discussion. Dick became the chief of Air Force Section of ARMISH-MAAG.

The Pittses

After one year at Ramstein AFB, Germany, in maintenance, and two years at RAF Alconbury, England, I looked forward to getting out of my job as the Chief of Maintenance in the 10th Tactical Wing. Since the aging RF-4 reconnaissance aircraft were scheduled for phase-out and the remaining part of my tour left not enough time to complete a phase-in of the replacement fleet, I chose to petition the Colonels Group for a flying assignment, so I could return to Operations, which had been the focus of my career. To my great surprise, I was offered an assignment to Iran as the Chief of Technical Assistance Field Teams, and Deputy to the Chief of Air Force Section of ARMISH MAAG. This entailed extending our overseas tour for two more years, for a consecutive total of five years, to which I cheerfully agreed. This made me perhaps the only troop not surprised that we were going to Iran.

My orders included going to the Foreign Affairs Executive Seminar in Washington D.C. then to an orientation at the Special Operations Center at Hurlburt AFB, Florida, and finally to Luke AFB, Arizona for a check-out in the F-5E fighter aircraft. All of this, interestingly, was paid for by the Iranian government, the Shah.

The seminar and the orientation were intended to acquaint me with our reason for being in Iran, some history of our involvement, what to expect regarding cultural differences and how to conduct the mission most effectively. The check-out on the F-5 was the requirement of the Shah that I fly a fighter plane to each of the airbases where U.S. Technical Assistance Field teams were located. (Earl)

Most military personnel assigned to Iran had to go through an intensive orientation program which is mentioned by several wives in this chapter. This is one of the sheets of information distributed and discussed early in the classes:

USAF SPECIAL OPERATIONS SCHOOL
MILITARY ASSISTANCE & ADVISORY COURSE
DEFINITIONS

IRANIAN, PERSIAN: A native of Iran (pronounced EAR-RON), speaking the Farsi or Persian language and is NOT an ARAB! The name “Iran” means Aryan and their language as well as their genealogy is Indo-European. They are not Semites and are very adamant about it. Even though the Farsi language is written in Arabic characters (There are 31 letters in Farsi vs. 28 in Arabic.), Farsi is not Semitic-based. Iran’s main religion is Islam, but they are of the schismatic Shiite type, rather than the orthodox Sunni. Zoroastrianism is still present and is woven into their Islamic beliefs as well.

ARAB: An Arab is a Semite, as are the Hebrews. The true Arab is relatively small in number, mainly centered in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and the Gulf States. If you want a good definition of an Arab in modern times, it is not necessarily a racial term but an ethnic one. “An arab is one who speaks the Arab language, considers himself part of the Umma, the community of the faithful, and carries in himself the pride of past Arab glories.”

MUSLIM: One who “submits” to the will of Allah, (Islam means submission, by the way.) and that Mohammad was His Prophet. A Muslim is not necessarily an Arab nor an Arab a Muslim. The most populous Muslim nation in the world is Indonesia, not Arab in any sense of the word.

ZIONIST: Not necessarily a JEW! A Zionist believes that the Jews belong in a Jewish state, centered in Palestine. There are even a few Jews who are not Zionists and are very vocal about it. The Zionist believes that Israel is God’s promised land, a form of heaven on earth, and is theirs (the Jews) because God gave it to them! The Kingdom of David is their aim, and this includes all of Lebanon, Damascus, Amman and most of the Sinai as well as Palestine.

HEBREW, JEW: A Hebrew is the Semitic racial term for people from the 11 tribes, whose founder is claimed to be Abraham. A Jew

is one who believes in the tenants of Judaism, not necessarily Hebrew or Zionist. Elizabeth Taylor and Sammy Davis Jr. were Jews but not Hebrew!

“Oh, to be in England, now that April's there” (Robert Browning, from “Home Thoughts from Abroad”). In 1976, we were in England and it was April. Of all the places we'd been stationed, England was my dream assignment. Ours was a three-year tour, and we'd been there only a bit less than two years. England was everything I'd ever imagined in my life-long love of British literature, not only the literary works I was assigned in college, but also the works I'd read before I even graduated from high school: Shakespeare, the Brontes, Chaucer, Hardy, etc. I was there. When not teaching for Big Bend Community College on base (RAF Alconbury), I hit the English roads, soaking in the venues of Stratford Upon Avon, the Bronte parsonage in the Yorkshire moors, the halls of Cambridge and Oxford, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, the fields of conflict where Robert the Bruce fought in Scotland. London was two hours away by train from the base and we enriched our lives in theatre, from *Oh! Calcutta!* to *Hamlet*. (Everyone knows *Hamlet*. Google *Oh! Calcutta!* and you'll find that most of the actors performed in the nude.)

I spent hundreds of early-morning hours on my hands and knees in British houses of worship; from large city churches to small village chapels, rubbing monumental brasses which cover the graves of important and wealthy Britons who were buried under the stone floors of the churches themselves. Brasses in England are found most frequently in the eastern counties of the country, counties which were easily accessed from RAF Alconbury. The subjects range from Knights in armor to religious figures in vestments to fine ladies in elaborate gowns and headdresses—dating from the early 1300s to the mid-17th century. We came home with forty-two of them, ranging in height from two feet to nine feet. Rubbings are done using a wax crayon (usually gold or silver) on a sheet of velvety black paper, and can take several hours for a large one. Many of the details are intricate and demand great pressure for the designs to be clear. After rubbing the brass (like children use crayons to transfer images like coins onto paper), one

had to cut it out, glue the back, mount it on a sheet of masonite, and cover the whole thing with vinyl heat-sealing film, available in the base craft shop where the sealing machines were located. The final work was then framed by my husband. Kneeling on cold stone floors in unheated churches in long, blustery English winters demanded dedication, but the results were priceless, especially now after the British government became concerned about the wear on the original brasses and reduced or halted rubbings of the most significant brasses.

My brass rubbing adventures were halted not by the government, but by my husband, who was in a non-flying job that he hated and was so inundated with maintenance problems on older aircraft that he never had time for those wonderful soooo British activities that kept me soooo enchanted. I knew he was looking for a flying assignment *anywhere*, but I had no idea where that might be. One day, in the middle of this unusually warm English summer, he came home to tell me that he finally found, and was accepted for, a flying job—in *Iran*! I didn't have to ask where the country was because we had read about an American officer being killed on his way to work in Tehran by an explosive device which also killed an Iranian woman and her child. I was leaving the land of tea and scones to live in a war zone! I was not a happy camper.

For us, preparing for the move was twice as convoluted as for those leaving from the States. We had been stationed at Ramstein AFB in Germany for one year (1973-74) and at RAF Alconbury for two years (1974-76). For Germany, we had not been permitted to pack a full shipment of household goods because base housing provided all of the large appliances, draperies, living room furniture, lamps, and carpeting. So, we shipped only our master bedroom set and dining room set. When we were sent to England, we had to purchase all living room furniture because the base had no more couches, etc. Now, Tehran, for which we had to ship *everything*. And there we were, with no nearby Sears or Walmart or whatever. Everything had to be ordered from catalogs (sight unseen): refrigerator, freezer, transformers, washer, dryer, stove, carpeting, bookcases, chests of drawers, etc. It all had to be shipped to England and held in base storage until our packing date. Then, somehow, our two cars, Earl's Volvo and my Ford, had to be

shipped to the States and placed in storage because TAFT personnel were not permitted to ship privately owned vehicles to Iran. Each car had to be driven by us to Dover, England, for shipment. Of course, Earl had to return to the States to attend briefings and to check out in the F-5, which he would be flying in Iran. We *immediately* started organizing our thinking and packing because Earl had to leave on May 10, while I stayed in England and continued packing. This was his schedule:

April 25—Drove Volvo to Dover and returned to base by train.

May 9—Flew London to Washington D.C. for Foreign Services Seminar May 10-28.

May 31—Flew to Hurlburt AFB, Florida, for briefings with the Military Assistance Advisory Group June 1-11.

June 13—Flew to New Orleans to pick up Volvo. Drove to Williams AFB (near Phoenix) to check out in the F-5 July 2-July 23.

July 24-26—Drove to El Paso (my home) to put the Volvo in storage and give my mother the key.

July 27—Flew to London and took train to base to help finish packing.

We had an additional problem during this time. Earl was a serious gun collector: antiques, modern, shotguns, handguns, replicas, etc. When we left for Germany in 1973, Earl built a large wooden case for the collection which he shipped, with our household goods, because our status of forces agreement with Germany permitted us to ship guns. I've not researched current regulations, but I'm quite certain that such *laissez faire* regulations regarding weapons of any kind no longer exist. When we were transferred to England, anticipating no problems, we again shipped the gun crate in our household goods. Wow! *Big* problem! When our goods were being unpacked at RAF Alconbury, the officer in charge of supervising the delivery took one look at the crate labeled "Guns," and all hell broke loose! The British, taking a dim view of all things NRA, ban guns everywhere and would not allow the crate to be off-loaded and carried into our residence. A British constable appeared from nowhere and informed us that the crate of

guns was going nowhere except the base armory. It went and there it stayed while we were in England. And then came the Iran assignment! We could ship a “minimum” number of guns—whatever that meant. So, in the middle of this confusing move, Earl packed two rifles and two handguns for Iran, and the crate with the rest of the weaponry had to be re-packed, labeled through customs, and shipped directly from the armory to my mother in El Paso. At this point, my mother now had keys to one Volvo and keys to a crate of weapons.

After Earl returned from the United States, this was our schedule:

August 4, 1976—Household goods packed for shipment to Iran.

August 5-8—We stayed in the BOQ to do paperwork to clear base and to say goodbye to friends.

August 9—We left for London by train and stayed for three days to say goodbye to England and to each other.

August 12—Earl flew to Tehran and I flew to New Orleans to pick up my Ford, which I had driven to Dover, England in July for shipment out of England.

August 13, 14, 15—I drove from New Orleans to El Paso. And there I *waited and waited* while Earl got settled in as commander of TAFT, flew all over Iran to the down-country bases of which he was now in charge, and worked to find us a place to live. Finally, he notified me that he had a handle on his job and had found us a home.

October 19—At last, I gave my mother another set of car keys and boarded a plane for Tehran: via Dallas, Washington D.C. and London (where I took a train to Alconbury for one last farewell to friends).

October 27—Finally, I landed at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran, where my husband and his driver met me and hauled my tired butt to the Evin Hotel. As soon as we checked in Earl told me that the next day his driver (Seyed) would pick me up and take me to the Head of Customs’ office where I would have to explain and sign papers for my birthday present. That’s a whole other story which is detailed in Chapter 3. And thus I began my own adventures in exotic Persia, on the far side of the world.

The Baumans

Our first reaction to the orders for Iran was surprise. Bruce had worked hard to get an assignment to Andrews AFB, near our home in Maryland, after five and one-half years at the Pentagon. We were supposed to be “frozen” at Andrews until 1978, but there were our orders on his desk when we returned from our vacation. Bruce said, “I’ll never take a three-week vacation again.” The time was too short to do anything about it. I asked, “How will we ever get ready to go? Prepare the girls (Amy (7) and Wendy (3)), sell the house and two cars, do all that shopping?” All of our family asked, “Where’s that? [Iran]”

Bruce attended the school for this tour the end of August and then we started a huge buying and selling spree. We needed to bring all household goods. Bought: all new major appliances, most clothes and personal items for two years, and Christmas gifts. Sold: our two cars (one a 6-month-old Toyota) and our home. We were provided with a car in Tehran, a Paykan or Iranian Hillman. We shopped till the day before we left! We settled on the house in January 1977 through Bruce’s dad.

The Johnsons

What a surprise! We had been at Kirtland AFB (Albuquerque) slightly over a year when Glenn came home and announced that we were going to Iran. “Where is that?” I asked.

The Days

At first I was stunned about the news. Then I talked with a neighbor at Duluth AFB who had just returned from an assignment in Iran. All in all, it didn’t sound too bad. After all, my mother had raised me and my five sisters to be independent and to “fly.” When we were old enough to leave the nest, most of us “flew”—some further than others. Going to Iran after having spent three years in Japan didn’t seem quite so bad.

We took four children—Michelle (11), Cara (10), Melissa (9), and Michael (6), and our dog, Samantha (Sam) [an Alaskan Husky and Poodle mix]—to Iran with us.

Upon receiving orders we talked to several people who had either lived in the Middle East or actually in Iran. With this insight we were able to

make some very wise purchases which helped. Clothing and shoes in several sizes for each of the children to grow into were essential. However, we didn't know how long it would be until we received our shipment. Fortunately it was relatively quick. We had to purchase some beds since we understood that most homes in Iran had tile floors and we were using Japanese futons. We didn't bring bikes, etc., because it would be unlikely that riding on the streets would be safe and we wouldn't be in base housing. We had a great gas stove, but not knowing how large our kitchen would be, we decided to sell the stove and purchased a 30" gas stove (apartment size!). That was a great purchase as we only had about 30" for a stove or put it under the window where the curtains hung down over it. We knew that electricity either had to be converted or we needed to purchase 220 appliances. So, taking expensive electronic equipment was kept to a minimum. (My sewing machine was okay while I was there, but upon our return I had to have the motor rebuilt! The transformer electricity had messed it up!)

We knew that many homes in Tehran had swimming pools, and we were determined to find this luxury for our children, to help them through what could be a very restricting assignment for all of us. With that in mind, we purchased a pool filter that was 110/220 voltage switchable. We found out what filters were available in Iran and got one that used the same. The unit was a little larger than a Shop-Vac and had all the hoses and stuff needed to keep a pool clean. It was pricey, but worth every penny because of the enjoyment our kids got from that pool, which was always crystal clear.

We had purchased all the Christmas gifts for the children and shipped them. Of course, we didn't get them until well after Christmas, so our first Christmas in Iran was an original. Everyone drew pictures of the gift they would give the others and folded them in an envelope. Each of the children contributed a worn out T-shirt to the dog as her gift. On Christmas morning we each opened our paper gifts and had a great time playing games, eating and playing in the back yard. Later, when the shipment arrived, we had another Christmas with a tree and all.

The Broermans

October is a beautiful month in Illinois and Indiana. The trees look as if someone has spilled buckets of paint over them. The air is crisp and the feel

of winter approaching makes you appreciate the sunny days of fall all the more. I had put up jars of crabapple jelly and jars of tomatoes, apples and apple butter. My pantry was full of the goodies, and the freezer was full of beef and chicken that I had purchased at wholesale prices.

Not all was happy, however. In September 1976, we discovered that my mother's cancer was back, with a vengeance. It had invaded almost every organ in her body and the outlook was grim. My oldest son had just turned sixteen and gotten his driver's license. Overnight he developed the worst teenage attitude I had ever encountered. Add to this the fact that my six-year-old was starting her first year of school. So now we have the Good, the Bad and the WE ARE GOING WHERE???. OMG!!!!

My first thoughts were: there is no way I can go. Second thoughts: there is no way I can handle two teenagers alone. The second thoughts won out. Then comes the reality that I have to pack and prepare for an assignment to the Middle East (aka the middle of nowhere). (Peg)

Toward the end of 1976 while at Chanute AFB, Illinois, I received short notice orders for Iran; the reason given was that the original selectee was allegedly considered persona non grata by the Iranians due to his having given failing grades to Iranian students in training (according to him). Surprise!! I had run a school at Lowry AFB with numerous Iranian students—and failed several, who were sent back to Iran. In fact, I had been visited by then Brigadier General Jahanbani, who insisted that I tell him of any students who were failing blocks of instruction in what was then the most complex electronics school in the Air Force. He was most impressed when I told him that many Americans failed blocks—that the key was that after repetition, they completed the course. He seemed satisfied, and told me that I was to send the students home if they were not performing to the proper level.

At the time, we were stationed close to our families, and Peg was able to go often to visit her mother, who was in the terminal stages of cancer. We moved out of our on-base housing, and into guest housing. Then—revelation—the word came that I was supposed to go to Florida to the Defense Institute of Security Assistance Management School. The bad point was that Peg was with her mother, the school had already started, and they wanted to know why I wasn't there. I called my half sister (18) and got her

to come and stay with the kids while I drove all night to get her. She had never been out of her small town in Indiana where she was raised. I dumped her off at the base (thank God, our oldest boy, Scott, had an ID and driver's license.) and bailed for Florida.

Mad rush to Florida, got one day of school, learned all about letter bombs—and nothing else. According to regulations I was supposed to get two weeks of rudimentary Farsi—didn't happen.

I went back to Chanute AFB, delivered half-sister home, gathered everyone up and departed for Evansville, IN. Next big decision was do I go to Iran without family? Thanks to Peg's mother ("The Warden" to boyfriends and, ultimately, sons-in-law), the decision was made. While she was lying in a coma, Peg and her sister (also an Air Force wife) were chatting about the options. With that, The Warden roused herself from coma, sat up in bed, and announced that there was no decision—said Peg's place was with me. (Ramon)

The Beckmans

It was on my birthday, November 8, 1976 at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I had just gone home for lunch after a rousing rehearsal with the Skylarks for our Christmas program. Rod, my husband, was home, looking none too happy. When he told me that we had an assignment to Iran, I was shocked beyond belief. I had always been perfectly willing to go anywhere that was required, but taking four teenagers to a Muslim country was not something that had figured into my plan for the family, but off we went, crying all the way.

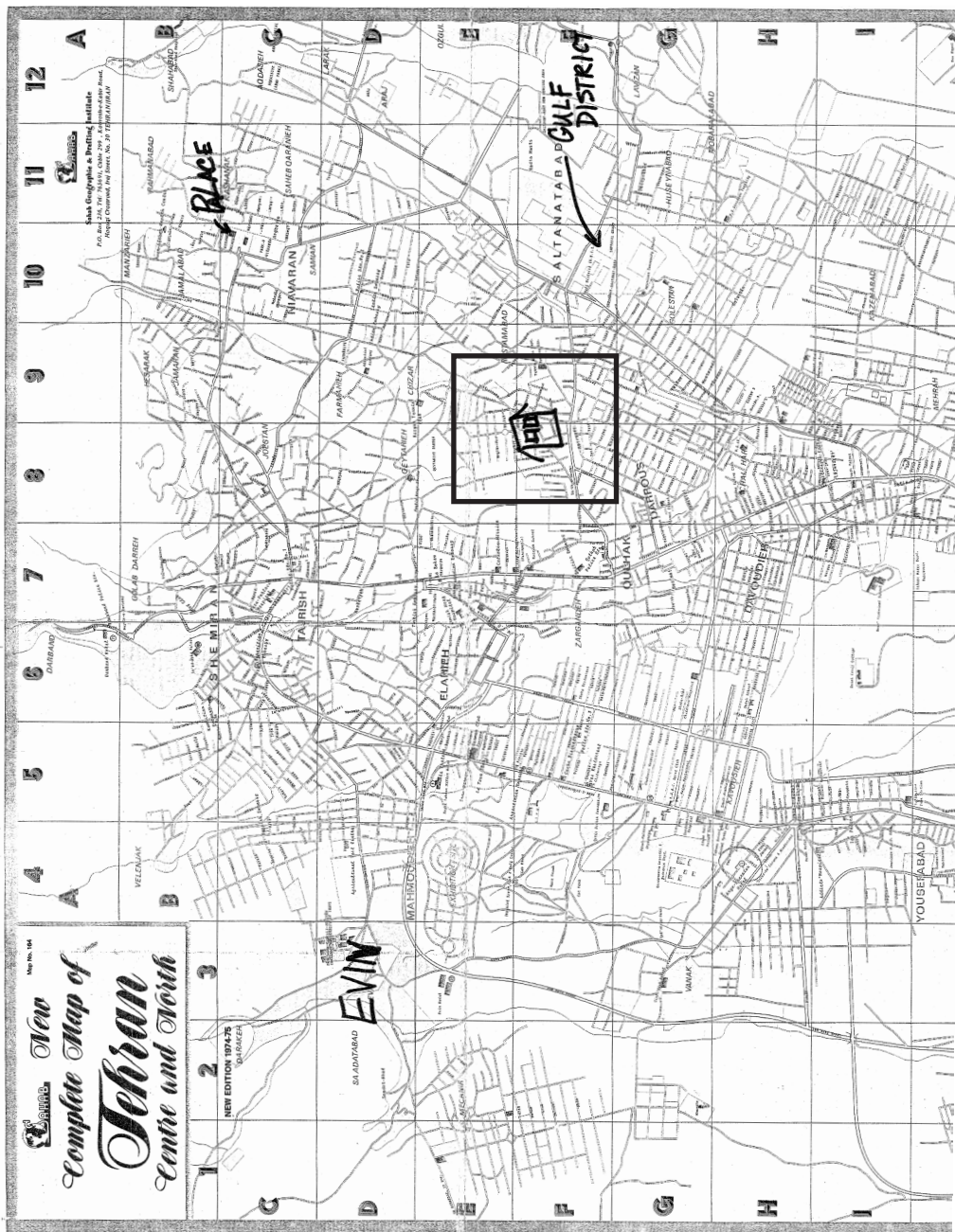
The Pedersens

When we got our orders for Iran, I thought it must be an error. I wasn't really sure where Iran was. Because several people I knew had orders cancelled, I was hoping that was a possibility. One of the ladies I golfed with was moaning about their assignment to Hawaii, which falls under the category of "some people are never happy." So we just went about our normal activities. I was sure it was all a mistake, until Larry got orders for his orientation class in Florida where he learned that Iran was pronounced "ear-on." It was time to get serious and we quickly ordered our appliances from Sears. Our timing was pretty good as they arrived the same day as our mov-

ing truck. We put on our positive attitudes and left the beginning of April 1977. Mark and Lisa had already passed to the next grades, so we did not have to put them in school on arrival. They loved living in the Evin Hotel.

The Schecks

Ron and I were stationed at Minot AFB, North Dakota (frigid “Why Not Minot!”) when, in February 1977, he received orders for Tehran. At the time he was on two-week temporary duty at sunny Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson. He called me that morning, telling me we had orders. I asked, “Where?” and he said, “Tehran!” Because of a bad connection or mental denial, I kept hearing, “Milan.” I tried, “Italy?” and still kept hearing “Milan.” Finally, after several stuttered clarifications, there was no doubt in my mind that we had a twenty-four-month assignment to Tehran, Iran, not Milan, Italy.



Rare map of Tehran showing key points mentioned in the book. Of note, the Shah's Palace in the upper right-hand corner, the United States Embassy, the Bazaar (bottom center) and



Doshen Tappeh Air Base, lower right. Inset highlights the area where the majority of the U.S. families lived. (Courtesy of Sandy and Earl Pitts)

