

## Across Continents and Generations: A Legacy of Promethean Philanthropy

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the transformative power of “Promethean philanthropy” through the interconnected narratives of William Van Til, an American educator in 1960s Iran, and a young Afghan scholar displaced by war in the 2020s. Drawing on Van Til’s diary entries and the experiences of the Afghan scholar, the research explores the challenges and triumphs of cross-cultural educational development. It examines how Van Til’s dedication to education, akin to the mythological titan Prometheus’s gift of fire, laid the groundwork for future educators and transcended generational and geographical boundaries. The study highlights the enduring impact of mentorship, the resilience of the human spirit, and the critical role of education in fostering intellectual growth and bridging cultural divides. By weaving together these narratives, the paper underscores the timeless value of knowledge-sharing in shaping destinies and forging connections across diverse societies.*

### INTRODUCTION

The mythological titan Prometheus defied the gods to bring fire, and with it, knowledge, to humanity. His act sparked a fire that continues to burn brightly, inspiring generations to share their expertise and foster intellectual growth across cultures and continents. This spirit of “Promethean philanthropy” weaves a narrative that connects William Van Til, an American educator in the early 1960s, to a young scholar from Afghanistan displaced by war in the early 2020s.

The essence of Prometheus’s gift lies not just in the act of giving but in the transformative power of knowledge to bridge gaps and ignite progress across diverse societies. This narrative highlights how a single spark of wisdom can illuminate countless lives and transcend boundaries, creating an enduring legacy. The positive impact of sharing knowledge can be seen in how it encourages new ideas, empowers marginalized communities, and fosters a global sense of interconnectedness and mutual growth. Prometheus’s defiance thus symbolizes the courage to challenge the status quo and ignite intellectual curiosity that transcends generational and geographical confines.

William Van Til, like Prometheus, embarked on a transformative journey, documented in captivating diary entries. His mission echoed the Titan’s

act—to offer his expertise as an advisor (a neologism we coin to represent the overlap of visitation and advising), nurturing the burgeoning education system in Iran. He could not have known that his son, Jon Van Til, would decades later become a key figure in a similar story, albeit under far more harrowing circumstances. William's dedication to education was not just a professional endeavor; it was a deeply personal commitment to the belief that education is a universal right. His work in Iran laid the groundwork for future educators and highlighted the critical role of cultural exchange in educational development. His diary entries provide a window into the challenges he faced, from cultural barriers to political tensions, and his unwavering resolve to make a positive impact. These experiences underscored the importance of perseverance, empathy, and adaptability in the face of adversity, themes that continue to resonate in today's global educational landscape. By documenting his journey, William Van Til not only chronicled his own experiences but also left a legacy that would inspire and guide future educators.

Fast forward to 2019. The Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan forced a scholar brimming with potential to flee his homeland. Seeking refuge and the opportunity to continue his academic pursuits, he landed at Marmara University in Turkey. It was there, amidst the bustling halls of academia, that his path intersected with the legacy of William Van Til. Jon Van Til, now a professor emeritus himself, was on a Fulbright assignment at Marmara. Meeting at a session designed to introduce doctoral students to the advisor, they forged an unlikely connection—a son witnessing the fruits of his father's Promethean efforts, and a young scholar displaced by war, desperately seeking the very knowledge William Van Til had striven to impart. This meeting was more than serendipity; it was a testament to the enduring nature of educational mentorship and the bonds it can create across time and geography. The young scholar's determination to continue his studies despite the upheaval reflects the resilience and tenacity of scholars worldwide who face similar challenges. This encounter also underscores the profound impact that mentorship and educational support can have, offering hope and direction to those navigating the tumultuous waters of displacement and uncertainty.

In this study, we will explore the captivating narratives of both William Van Til and the young Afghan scholar (whose identity we shall not reveal for reasons that will become clear as our narrative unfolds). William Van Til's diary entries (selections presented in the Appendix to this paper) offer a unique perspective on the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural advisitation in early 1960s Iran. The Afghan scholar's story, on the other hand, sheds light on the devastating impact of political upheaval on education and the enduring quest for knowledge even in the face of immense adversity. The narrative takes a further turn in 2021, showcasing the transformative power of mentorship across generations.

By weaving these stories together, we explore the enduring legacy of William Van Til's Promethean philanthropy and its profound impact on the lives of educators and students across the globe. This exploration underscores the resilience of the human spirit and the indomitable drive to learn and teach, even amidst the most challenging circumstances. It is a celebration of the power of education to transcend barriers and the relentless pursuit of enlightenment in a world fraught with turmoil. The paper ultimately aims to highlight the timeless value of knowledge-sharing and the way it can shape destinies, forge connections, and build bridges across divides.

## WILLIAM VAN TIL'S ODYSSEY: A CASE STUDY IN CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

William Van Til's story, as captured in his diary entries, offers a captivating glimpse into the complexities of cross-cultural educational development. In 1962, at the age of 51, this seasoned professor of education at New York University embarked on a challenging yet rewarding journey to Iran. Van Til, a curriculum specialist for American secondary schools, grappled with a "complex mixture of emotions" – a blend of excitement, trepidation, and the inevitable discomfort of leaving the familiar behind. His internal struggle, documented in his diary, reflects the universal human experience of venturing into the unknown, a sentiment that resonates with readers from any background.

Van Til's Iranian odyssey was not without its hurdles. Cultural barriers loomed large. Unfamiliar customs, language differences necessitating interpreters, and contrasting social norms, particularly regarding gender roles, presented a steep learning curve. He describes, for instance, his initial struggles navigating social interactions, highlighting the importance of nonverbal communication and cultural sensitivity in fostering trust and rapport. The educational landscape itself held its own set of challenges. Rural schools often lacked resources and infrastructure, while established educational practices created a current of resistance to change. His diary entries detail specific examples of these challenges, such as encountering outdated textbooks or overcrowded classrooms, providing valuable insights into the practical hurdles faced by educators in developing nations. William Van Til's frustration mounted as he encountered officials who prioritized appearances over practical solutions for improvement. He recounts instances where bureaucratic hurdles impeded progress, underscoring the need for streamlined processes and a focus on measurable outcomes in educational reform.

Yet, amidst these obstacles, triumphs emerged. William Van Til's immersion in Iranian culture fostered a deeper understanding of the nation's unique educational needs. He witnessed firsthand the remarkable dedication and resilience of Iranian educators, especially those serving in remote areas. His diary entries are filled with instances that illuminate the efforts of teachers

who were visited, observed, and interviewed; dedicated individuals who often went above and beyond to ensure their students received a quality education despite limited resources. This exposure allowed him to identify areas ripe for improvement within the Iranian education system. By documenting specific examples of effective teaching practices observed in rural schools, William Van Til offered valuable suggestions for replicating these successes across the country.

### THE ENDURING VALUE OF WILLIAM VAN TIL'S DIARY ENTRIES

The richness of William Van Til's diary entries extends far beyond a personal chronicle of his experiences. They offer a multifaceted resource with enduring value for historians, educators, and anyone interested in cross-cultural understanding. His report provides:

1. **A Window into History:** Van Til's entries serve as a primary source, meticulously documenting a specific period in Iranian education history. They offer a unique snapshot of the educational landscape during the 1960s, capturing details of curriculum, resources, and prevailing practices. These firsthand accounts provide invaluable insights for historians studying the evolution of Iranian education and its place within the broader context of the nation's development.
2. **A Fostering of Cross-Cultural Empathy:** Van Til's diary acts as a bridge between cultures. By sharing his own struggles and triumphs navigating unfamiliar customs, language barriers, and social norms, he equips readers with the tools to approach cross-cultural interactions with greater sensitivity and understanding. His experiences highlight the importance of nonverbal communication, cultural awareness, and building trust in fostering collaboration across cultures.
3. **A Guide for Educators:** The reflective nature of Van Til's diary entries offers a valuable resource for educators venturing into unfamiliar territory. He doesn't shy away from sharing his frustrations with bureaucratic hurdles or outdated practices. However, he also celebrates the dedication and resilience of Iranian educators, particularly those serving in remote areas. By documenting specific examples of effective teaching practices and areas ripe for improvement, Van Til provides educators with a blueprint for navigating the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural educational development.

William Van Til's visit to Iran in the early 1960s underscores his commitment to advancing modern education in disadvantaged societies. His efforts during this period align with transformational philanthropy, emphasizing the creation of lasting social change. Van Til's approaches reflect the principles of

effective altruism and social capital theory, demonstrating how philanthropic actions can foster community development and social cohesion.<sup>1</sup> His work highlights the importance of innovative strategies in building networks and trust, which are crucial for societal progress. By focusing on modernizing education, Van Til aimed to address systemic inequalities and empower disadvantaged communities with the tools needed for self-sustained growth. His mission embodies the Promethean spirit—marked by innovation and the quest for progress—paralleling the efforts of many contemporary nonprofit, voluntary, and governmental organizations to similarly address complex social issues by pushing the boundaries of traditional service, philanthropy, and governance.<sup>2</sup>

Van Til's introduction of modern educational practices in Iran serves as a prime example of how the Promethean spirit can drive meaningful social change and tackle educational inequalities. Analyzing his impact through legacy theory and transformative learning theory reveals how his initiatives align with John Dewey's vision of education as a means for social progress and democratic renewal.<sup>3</sup> His approach provided new learning opportunities that addressed contemporary challenges and aimed to foster long-term societal benefits. By integrating modern methodologies and educational practices, Van Til sought to bridge gaps in the existing system and promote greater equity in educational access. His work illustrates the power of educational philanthropy as a tool for social transformation and highlights the potential for such initiatives to inspire broader systemic change.

Examining the intersections of philanthropy, Promethean themes, and educational legacies in Van Til's work uncovers underexplored areas in existing scholarship. His efforts to introduce modern education in Iran highlight the adaptability of philanthropic strategies in diverse cultural contexts. The innovative approaches he employed offer valuable insights into overcoming educational barriers and promoting equitable opportunities. As Brest and Harvey note, "effective philanthropy is not about giving away money; it's about making a difference," which underscores the importance of thoughtful engagement in philanthropic efforts.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on disadvantaged communities, Van Til's work demonstrated how tailored philanthropic strategies could address specific regional needs while contributing to broader educational reform. This exam-

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1 Peter Singer, *The Life You Can Save: How to Play Your Part in Ending World Poverty* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 2010).

2 Cf. William Van Til, *The Role of the Educator in Developing Nations* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1988); Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (New York: Vintage, 2019).

3 John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

4 Paul Brest and Hal Harvey, *Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 45.

ination also sheds light on the long-term impact and relevance of such initiatives within different sociopolitical frameworks.

Soon after Van Til's visit, Iran embarked on a wave of educational reforms under the Shah in the 1960s and 70s, reflecting a continued effort to modernize the country. These reforms included significant investments in education and infrastructure, which aimed to bring about social and economic progress. However, this modernization trend faced a dramatic shift with the Islamic Revolution of 1978, which halted many of these reforms and led to a period of substantial upheaval. Despite the challenges and changes, the principles of Promethean philanthropy that Van Til advocated continued to resonate in discussions about educational and social progress in the region. Although the immediate impact of his visit was limited, the foundational ideas and values he introduced contributed to a broader context of educational advancement and reform, influencing ongoing conversations about the role of modern education in societal development.

### DEFYING PERIL: THE UNWAVERING PURSUIT OF EDUCATION BY AN AFGHAN SCHOLAR

The narrative of an Afghan scholar's relentless pursuit of education amid adversity embodies another aspect of Promethean philanthropy, where the quest for knowledge and enlightenment defies peril and hardship. Following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan embarked on a transformative journey marked by significant advancements in education, human rights, and civil society. This period of renewal, bolstered by international aid, symbolized hope and progress, especially for Afghan women and girls who gained access to education after years of denial. Central to this transformation was the evolution of civil society, which emerged as a resilient force against the resurgence of the Taliban. Jon Van Til's theory of the third sector elucidates the role of civil society organizations as dynamic entities navigating the space between the governmental and business sectors, fostering community development and social cohesion.<sup>5</sup> Against this backdrop, a young graduate from Herat's Faculty of Law and Political Science emerged, driven by a deep-seated desire to contribute to his nation's reconstruction.

In the northwest part of Afghanistan, in the city of Herat, among immigrant returnees from neighboring countries, this young Afghan graduate harbored dreams of contributing to his nation's rebuilding. This aspiration was nurtured by a group of Herat University visiting scholars, including his father, who returned from a U.S. government-funded visiting program. They pioneered the country's first legal clinic, inspired by American law schools

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5 Jon Van Til, *Growing Civil Society: From Nonprofit Sector to Third Space* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).



but tailored to Afghan rules and styles. This legal clinic not only served as a center for young Afghan students to practice law but also functioned as a bridge connecting traditional institutions to the modern university system through its street law program. The young Afghan's achievements at Herat University's Faculty of Law and Political Science drew the attention of the Legal Education Support Program for Afghanistan (LESPA), an initiative at the University of Washington School of Law. LESPA awarded scholarships to Afghan law school professors to pursue degrees at the University of Washington School of Law. Upon his graduation, he returned to Herat to continue teaching, driven by his commitment despite knowing the significant security risks and the challenges that awaited him.

Indeed, teaching at Herat University proved to be fraught with challenges, as he faced multiple threats from insurgent groups due to his teachings on democracy, human rights, and women's rights—topics fiercely opposed by extremist groups. Despite the perilous environment, his commitment to education and justice remained steadfast. His dedication was recognized with a Ph.D. scholarship from Marmara University, which not only offered an opportunity for advanced study but also served as a crucial refuge from the immediate dangers he faced in Afghanistan. While in Istanbul, he met Jon Van Til, whose legacy of Promethean philanthropy became instrumental in his journey. Van Til's commitment to education and his support for scholars in peril helped facilitate the scholar's escape from Afghanistan when the Taliban returned to power in 2021. Now a visiting scholar at Rutgers University, he continues to navigate numerous challenges. His family remains in Afghanistan, and he must protect his identity and engage in self-censorship. Despite these difficulties, he upholds the legacy of Promethean philanthropy by teaching students at Rutgers-Camden, writing papers on civil society and peace in Afghanistan, and offering online courses for Afghan girls. Though life in exile is demanding, his resolve to advance education and advocacy remains unwavering, reflecting the enduring impact of Van Til's philanthropic legacy.

The scholar's journey can be understood through the concept of Promethean Philanthropy, a theme Marty Sulek explores in his dissertation, *Gifts of Fire*. Sulek interprets the Promethean myth as symbolizing not only the gift of knowledge but also the ongoing responsibility to use that knowledge to improve humanity.<sup>6</sup> This interpretation aligns closely with the scholar's experiences. The Afghan scholar's efforts to enhance his English skills, study abroad, and return to Afghanistan to contribute to reconstruction reflect this Promethean ideal. His work at the legal clinic, which bridges traditional insti-

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6 Marty Sulek, "Gifts of Fire: An Historical Analysis of the Promethean Myth for the Light It Casts Upon the Philosophical Philanthropy of Protagoras, Socrates, and Plato; and Prolegomena to Consideration of the Same in Bacon and Nietzsche" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2011).

tutions with modern education, embodies the act of bringing enlightenment to challenging circumstances. Despite facing numerous threats and obstacles, his dedication to teaching and advancing social justice illustrates the core of philosophical philanthropy as described by Sulek.<sup>7</sup>

### FROM IRAN TO AFGHANISTAN: THE ENDURING INFLUENCE OF VAN TIL'S EDUCATIONAL VISION

William Van Til's work in Iran and the Afghan scholar's journey share a common thread: the belief in the transformative power of education. Just as Prometheus brought fire to humanity, illuminating the path to progress, both Van Til and the Afghan scholar brought knowledge and enlightenment to societies in need. It is an enduring legacy of Prometheus that with the gift of knowledge there come stern expectations for moral responsibility. Van Til's work faced significant challenges, including resistance from traditionalists and political instability, much like the Afghan scholar's struggles with insurgent threats. Yet, both persisted in their missions, driven by a commitment to fostering social justice and educational advancement. The Afghan scholar's eventual move to Marmara University, where he would meet Jon Van Til, symbolizes the continuation of this legacy of Promethean philanthropy across generations and continents.

Iran, the birthplace of Zoroastrianism, and Afghanistan, home to the legendary cave where Prometheus was said to have been chained, are steeped in historical and mythological significance. William Van Til's journey to Iran in the 1960s aligns him with the Promethean archetype, embodying the mission of bringing new teachings to a foreign land. Zoroaster, the Promethean fire-priest turned prophet, introduced the concept of monotheism, a transformative idea that reshaped spiritual beliefs. Similarly, Van Til's work aimed to revolutionize the educational landscape in Iran, introducing modern practices and ideas to a system resistant to change. His dedication to educational philanthropy mirrors Prometheus's gift of fire—an enduring symbol of enlightenment and progress. This Promethean spirit is evident in Van Til's efforts to bridge cultural gaps and foster understanding through education, a mission fraught with challenges but driven by a vision of lasting societal improvement.

The attempts at modernization in both Iran and Afghanistan have faced significant setbacks, leading to periods of extremism and authoritarian rule. Van Til's experiences in Iran during the 1960s and the subsequent reforms under the Shah highlight the challenges of implementing educational changes in

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7 Marty Sulek, "Recovering the Original Meaning of Philanthropy: A Prelude to Consideration of the Philanthropy of Faculty Work," in *Faculty Work and the Public Good: Philanthropy, Engagement, and Academic Professionalism*, ed. G. G. Shaker (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015), 31–43.



a traditional society. These efforts were dramatically interrupted by the Islamic Revolution in 1978, which halted many of the progressive reforms. Similarly, Afghanistan's post-Taliban era saw a surge in educational and social advancements, only to be disrupted by the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Civil society in both countries has played a crucial role in resisting authoritarianism, exemplified by movements like "Women, Life, Freedom" in Iran and "Bread, Work, and Freedom" in Afghanistan. These movements underscore the resilience of civil society in advocating for human rights and social justice, despite the oppressive regimes they confront.<sup>8</sup>

The journey of an Afghan scholar, shaped by the transformative power of education, mirrors and extends the narrative begun by Van Til. This scholar, having benefited from educational opportunities in Afghanistan, represents the fruition of such educational initiatives in the region. Despite facing threats from insurgent groups due to teachings on democracy and human rights, the scholar's dedication to education remained steadfast. This commitment is evident in the pursuit of advanced studies abroad and the subsequent return to Afghanistan to contribute to the nation's rebuilding efforts. The scholar's experiences reflect a reciprocal relationship where the seeds of educational reform planted by William Van Til have borne fruit in subsequent generations of scholars. This ongoing struggle and commitment to education and social justice transcend borders and generations, highlighting the enduring impact of Promethean philanthropy.

In both Iran and Afghanistan, civil society has emerged as a formidable force in shaping resistance against authoritarian regimes. Van Til's observations of the dedication of Iranian educators during his visit highlight the foundational role of civil society in fostering resilience and promoting progressive ideals. This tradition continues in contemporary Iran with the "Green Movement," where civil society played a pivotal role in protesting the 2009 election results, demanding greater political freedom and transparency. Similarly, in Afghanistan, where the Taliban now control the country, civil society has been a main driving force against their oppressive policies, particularly those targeting the rights of women and girls. These movements illustrate the enduring power of civil society to mobilize and inspire change, even in the face of significant obstacles.

The legacy of educational philanthropy, as embodied by William Van Til and continued by subsequent scholars, underscores the transformative power of education in promoting social change. Van Til's introduction of modern educational practices in Iran and the ongoing efforts to support Afghan education

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8 Sahar Fetrat, "Bread, Work, Freedom—Afghan Women's Two Years of Resistance," *Human Rights Watch*, August 16, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/16/bread-work-freedom-afghan-womens-two-years-resistance>.

highlight the critical role of education in addressing systemic inequalities and empowering disadvantaged communities. By bridging traditional and modern educational approaches, Van Til and these scholars demonstrate how tailored philanthropic strategies can effectively address regional needs and contribute to broader educational reforms. Their work exemplifies the Promethean spirit of bringing enlightenment and progress to societies facing significant challenges, underscoring the enduring impact of educational philanthropy in fostering social transformation.<sup>9</sup>

## ADVANCING EDUCATION THROUGH ADVISITATION: THE IMPACT OF WILLIAM VAN TIL'S LEGACY

This section explores the concept of advisitation through the lens of William Van Til's 1962 sojourn in Iran. A distinguished figure in American education, Van Til dedicated his life to advancing educational practices and principles. Renowned for his innovative work in secondary school curriculum development, he had established himself as a leading academic by the age of 51. His deep-rooted commitment to education as a catalyst for social change was evident in his prolific career at New York University, where he played a central role in shaping educational practices. Van Til's belief in education as a transformative force resonates with the philosophical insights of Protagoras, the chief harbinger of the Greek Enlightenment in classical Athens.<sup>10</sup> Sulek emphasizes the role of wisdom and human understanding in fostering societal improvement, aligning with Van Til's conviction that education can bridge cultural divides and enhance the human experience. By contextualizing Van Til's contributions within this framework, we can better understand how his lifelong dedication to education informs ongoing discussions about its significance and capacity to effect social change.

## THE JOURNEY TO IRAN

In 1962, an unanticipated opportunity arose when Van Til was invited to join a small team dispatched by the Agency for International Development (AID) to assess Iran's educational landscape.<sup>11</sup> Although he had never visited the country and lacked prior expertise in its study, he embraced the challenge with a blend of professional curiosity and personal trepidation. Van Til confessed to having struggled against "forebodings of personal disaster," an indica-

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9 Sulek, *Gifts of Fire*.

10 Marty Sulek, "Recovering the Wisdom of Protagoras: A Reinterpretation of the Prometheia Trilogy," in *A New Politics for Philosophy: Essays on Plato, Nietzsche, and Strauss*, ed. James Dunn and Peter Telli (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 123–56.

11 William Van Til, *Iran All the Way: The 1962 Diary of an Advisor*, ed. Jon Van Til, edited version by Roy VT (May 14, 2024), Appendix A.

tion of the inner turmoil he faced as he embarked on this daunting mission.<sup>12</sup> This 50-day mission marked a significant chapter in his career, fueled by his lifelong dedication to improving educational systems and a spirit of adventure. His journey eastward to the remote corners of Iran—where it borders Afghanistan and Pakistan—became more than just a geographical voyage; it was a profound exploration into the socio-political complexities of educational reform. Van Til reflected on this journey, noting that “the road to Zahedan is a story of some experiences on the trip East in Iran to the corner of the world where Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan join”.<sup>13</sup>

Van Til’s experiences in Iran provided him with profound insights into the complexities of educational reform in a rapidly changing socio-political environment. The poverty he observed left a lasting impact on him, as he remarked that “the poverty-stricken children of the villages couldn’t conceive of such foods and living” as he was accustomed to.<sup>14</sup> His observations and interactions during this period not only enriched his understanding of global education issues but also deepened his appreciation for the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in educational development. This mission underscored the vital role of international collaboration in addressing educational challenges and highlighted the interconnectedness of educational practices across different contexts.

Van Til’s engagement within a foreign culture presented numerous challenges, particularly as he navigated the complexities of a new environment and the linguistic barriers inherent in cross-cultural communication. He described his accommodations as “barracks dormitory,” a stark contrast to the comforts of home.<sup>15</sup> Despite the initial uncertainty, he found solace and purpose in journaling. His daily reflections, meticulously documented in letters to his family, served as a valuable tool for processing his experiences. These letters, which would later be compiled into a 91-page manuscript edited by his son Jon Van Til, captured both the triumphs and tribulations of his advisitation, providing a vivid portrayal of life in Iran.

## EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN IRAN

The power of education as a dynamic force to bring social change has captivated scholars and practitioners for centuries, and understanding the Iranian educational context was a foundational aspect of Van Til’s cross-cultural educational efforts. The modernization of Iran’s education system, influenced significantly by the interplay between the Shi’ite clerics and the middle class, pre-

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12 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 5.

13 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 5.

14 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 2.

15 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 2.

sented unique challenges and opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Van Til's diary notes reveal his deep reflections on these complexities. For example, he observed the tension between traditional Islamic education and the introduction of Western-style curricula.<sup>17</sup> This observation highlights the challenges of balancing cultural preservation with modernization in the educational system. Additionally, Van Til's encounters with Iranian educators and students revealed the deep-rooted respect for authority and hierarchy within the educational system. These observations underscore the importance of understanding the cultural context in order to effectively engage with Iranian educators and students.

Overcoming cultural barriers was another significant challenge in Van Til's work. The Iranian educational landscape was deeply rooted in traditional values and religious doctrines, often resistant to progressive reforms. Van Til's strategy, as articulated by Beineke, involved engaging local educators and community leaders to build trust and foster mutual understanding.<sup>18</sup> For instance, in his diary, Van Til described his experience meeting local educators and parents and detailed his efforts to gain their trust through empathy and respect. On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1962, he noted a visit to a teacher education program where villagers, mostly mothers, were learning teaching methods despite harsh conditions and low pay. He observed their eagerness to improve their teaching practices despite the challenging circumstances, reflecting his understanding and respect for their situation.<sup>19</sup> Van Til used these observations to emphasize the importance of empathy and respect in cross-cultural exchanges, demonstrating that genuine collaboration and respect for local traditions are crucial for successful educational reform. By respecting and incorporating local customs and beliefs, Van Til managed to introduce new ideas in a way that was acceptable to the community, thus overcoming resistance and facilitating meaningful change. His approach showed that understanding and adapting to the local context was essential for achieving progress in educational reform.

Building relationships was a critical component of Van Til's strategy for navigating cultural and educational landscapes. He recognized that effective educational reform could not be imposed from the outside but needed to be co-created with the local community. This approach involved not only working with educators but also engaging parents, students, and other stakeholders in the process—as Ira Shor emphasizes, empowering education requires the

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16 Mahdi Zahirinejad, "Education and Cultural Change in the Modernisation of Iran: The Role of Shi'ite Clerics and the Middle Class," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 75, no. 2 (2022): 122-137.

17 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 8.

18 John A. Beineke, *William Van Til: The Consistent Progressive* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998).

19 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 4.

active participation of all community members.<sup>20</sup> A vivid example of this can be found in Van Til's diary, where he describes his visit to a school that trained young men to teach in tent schools that moved with the tribes. Reflecting on the experience, he wrote, "These tribesmen are the equivalent of American Indians. They are strong, leathery, grave, tough, quiet, respectful. They are quietly contemptuous of city Iranians who are, to them, corrupt, soft, cowardly, pale. I ask whether they would rather teach in Tehran, Shiraz, or with the tribes. They chorus: 'With the tribes.'"<sup>21</sup> This encounter underscored Van Til's belief that education must be deeply connected to the culture and values of the people it serves. His ability to build strong, collaborative relationships was instrumental in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for educational change.

Charles Leadbeater and Annika Wong note that innovation in education often requires creative solutions to overcome limitations.<sup>22</sup> Van Til's experience in Iran offers a clear illustration of his pragmatic approach to education in resource-constrained environments. For example, his diary entries reveal the challenges faced in a village school with very basic facilities: "The school... two rooms of mud and stone separated by an entrance hall. The small windows in each room giving insufficient light. Dirt floor, very dusty. Black long benches, whittled and scarred."<sup>23</sup> This description highlights the severe resource constraints, underscoring Van Til's recognition of the difficulties in implementing reforms. Additionally, his efforts to train local educators and transform their identified problems into applicable solutions reflect his commitment to context-specific reform: "We asked for their recommendations... They replied with their problems... We translated their problems into recommendations."<sup>24</sup> This approach ensured that his reforms were relevant and implementable. Finally, Van Til's insights into the slow-paced life and his patience with local processes further emphasize his understanding of the need for sustainable and impactful change: "I who value short answers preferably in writing ask the same questions over and over... The task of adjustment and accommodation becomes mine."<sup>25</sup> These examples from Van Til's diary underscore his innovative problem-solving strategies and his dedication to adapting educational reforms to fit the local context, ensuring both their effectiveness and sustainability.

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20 Ira Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

21 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 3.

22 Charles Leadbeater and Annika Wong, *Innovations in Education: Lessons from Pioneers Around the World* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012).

23 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 10.

24 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 8.

25 Van Til, *Iran All the Way*, 8.

## A PROMETHEAN VISIONARY EMBODYING THE PROMETHEAN SPIRIT

Comparing William Van Til's work to the myth of Prometheus offers a profound insight into his contributions to education. Just as Prometheus brought fire to humanity, symbolizing enlightenment and progress, Van Til dedicated his life to spreading the fire of knowledge. His efforts in school desegregation and his broader commitment to democratic education reflect a modern-day Promethean spirit, determined to empower individuals through education and create a more just society. Van Til's work emphasized the importance of knowledge-sharing, viewing education as a tool for empowerment and social change. In our world today, which is increasingly marked by social injustices and inequality, his thought has never been more vital. It urges educators to adopt inclusive practices that promote equity, foster critical thinking, and equip students to engage meaningfully in society.

Building on Sulek's exploration of the Promethean visionary, one can draw parallels to William Van Til's approach to education and philanthropy. While Sulek discusses the importance of fostering innovation and empowerment in addressing social issues, Van Til's legacy embodies these ideals through his unwavering commitment to democratic education and social justice.<sup>26</sup> Just as the Promethean spirit encourages individuals to challenge the status quo for the betterment of society, Van Til's work in desegregation and equitable educational practices demonstrates a similar drive to ignite positive change. By integrating Sulek's insights with Van Til's contributions, it becomes evident that both figures share a common goal: to illuminate the path toward empowerment and social equity through knowledge and education, ultimately inspiring others to carry the torch of progress in their own communities.

The root of Van Til's philosophy is in the transformative power of knowledge-sharing thought. According to Van Til, education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or where they live. This perspective is especially important in our globalized society, where disparities between developed and developing nations often hinder equitable access to quality education. Van Til championed inclusive practices that promote equity and foster critical thinking among students. By encouraging an environment where knowledge is freely shared and discussed, he laid the groundwork for an education system that empowers all learners to thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

## A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

The emergence of a new generation of educators and scholars inspired by Promethean visions continue to advance their commitments to educational equity and innovation. One compelling example is the collaboration between

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26 Sulek, *Gifts of Fire*.



Jon Van Til and an Afghan scholar—which illustrate the cross-generational and cross-cultural impact of Van Til’s philosophy. Their story highlights the ongoing relevance of Van Til’s work in fostering a spirit of cooperation and mutual learning across diverse cultural contexts. This new wave of educators and scholars continues to build on Van Til’s foundation, working towards a future where education serves as a bridge between cultures and a beacon of hope for all.

Decades ago, William Van Til’s journey to Iran marked a pioneering effort that paved the way for future educational exchanges. Following in his father’s footsteps, Jon Van Til has sought to advance this legacy. In 2019, Jon was awarded a position as Fulbright specialist to serve for six weeks in Istanbul as a visiting scholar at Marmara University. His assignment was to assist faculty and students in the delivery of programs in the area of public administration. During a meeting with graduate students, he met a young Afghan educator. This encounter was more than a symbolic nod to his father’s work; it represented a significant moment in the ongoing dialogue between educators from regions experiencing political unrest and social challenges. The interaction between Jon Van Til and the Afghan scholar highlights the enduring relevance of Promethean principles in contemporary education, underscoring the importance of mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration.

The narrative of the young Afghan educator exemplifies the resilience and determination needed to overcome the obstacles posed by political and social turmoil. This narrative, rich with experiences of struggle and triumph, deserves and is provided a detailed exploration in its own right in a companion paper. It will appear in the next issue of *Philanthropia*. It serves as a powerful reminder that the quest for educational equity and social justice is an ever-evolving journey, that requires continuous effort and unwavering dedication. The experiences and insights of this Afghan scholar enriches our understanding of the value and impact of Promethean advisitation as its practitioners seek meaningful ways of crossing many of the bewildering boundaries extant in the contemporary world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## IRAN ALL THE WAY: the 1962 Diary of an Advisor

By William Van Til, Edited by Jon Van Til

In 1962, a professor of education at New York University joined a small team of Americans invited by the Agency for International Development (AID) to spend 50 days in Iran on a venture in advisitation. Van Til, at the time 51 years old, was well known as a progressive educator with a central interest in the development of curriculum within the American secondary school. His previous travels had not taken him to Iran; nor had he developed any academic specialization in its study. Like many other academics who each year respond to governmentally supported invitations for similar assignments, he responded to the invitation with a complex mixture of emotions: interest in putting his professional expertise to work; uncertainty about the actual task to be performed; discomfort about leaving home and family for almost two months.

During the two months of his visit, May and June, WVT regularly recorded his reflections, both personal and professional, in a series of letters addressed to his wife and children. Upon his return to the States, these 28 letters were typed and bound into an unpublished manuscript of some 91 pages. In the present paper, the thoughts of this advisor/visitor have been edited, 61 years after their writing, by one of WVT's addressees, his son Jon, now professor emeritus of Rutgers University, Camden, and himself an experienced advising visitor as Fulbright specialist to Northern Ireland, Hungary, and Turkey.

The present diary employs the neologism, "advisor", to comprehend the experience of the expert sent on temporary assignment to a new and unfamiliar country. The letters of WVT present his own story, and the number of his letters are titled with the steps identified as basic to the process of advisitation:

- 1) ARRIVAL
- 2) MEETING THE HOST
- 3) TOURS
- 4) VISITS
- 5) OUR SIDE
- 6) ON THE ROAD
- 7) LUNCHING
- 8) NATIONAL CHARACTER
- 9) VILLAGES
- 10) ILLNESS AND HEALTH

- 11) COUNTING THE DAYS
- 12) FATIGUE
- 13) MEETING THE CONTRACT
- 14) THE FINAL REPORT
- 15) APPRECIATION
- 16) AND NOW...

WVT begins his diary, as may be expected from a traveler entering unfamiliar lands, with a description of the sites passed through, in this case a Germany familiar to him followed by a first-time vision of Istanbul from the banks of the Bosphorus: *“to see it, think of Budapest gone Byzantine. The same massive buildings, nearness to water, picturesque and poverty-stricken side streets.”* (Throughout this paper, the original entries by WVT are presented in italics.)

## MAY 8: ARRIVAL

There follows a comfortable flight to Tehran, and the beginning of the formal visit. Having arrived at his destination, he is greeted by two members of his team and the AID host of the visit. Customs cleared, he is then driven to his accommodation, the description of which could be replicated line by line for his son's 2019 Fulbright assignment in Istanbul: *The apartment is undistinguished. The internal architecture could be called barracks dormitory. Bare walls, passable cot beds, a couch, tile floors, a shower which occasionally achieves lukewarm, an occasional cockroach, an occasional naked bulb and occasional shade, a refrigerator with a pitcher of drinking water. As Mercutio pointed out when wounded, ‘Not as deep as a well or as wide as a door—but twill serve’.*

## MAY 9: MEETING THE HOST

Up at 6:00 the next morning and to the offices of the Agency for International Development—*Much bigger than I thought—several buildings, scores of jeeps which run between the buildings the embassy and the apartments, elaborate personnel forms to fill out, pleasant staff members. I met the 30 in education (AID as a whole is several 100). They are pleasant people who have learned patience, who work long hours and are pleased with small results.... What their motivations are, I know not. They are said to live well, in villas and the like. They are the new “British”, the 19th century moved into the 20th.*

*The strangest experience of the day was to be a participant in my first interpreted conversation. No wonder the Russians and Americans find it hard to communicate! Doctor Hendershot (whose name must always appear on the mail to make it legitimate) brought me to a palace (literally) to meet the Minister of Education who is attended by a beribboned military officer and who is addressed as Your Excellency. He was head of the teacher's organization which won a strike and doubled teacher pay. The interpreter, a PhD from Michigan State and a fine young man, translated*

*what the minister said to Hendershot and me what we said to the minister and entourage. Incidentally, the interpreter is head of the research project from which the minister wanted to transfer funds. And all this he dutifully translated—and did not interpolate his views.*

*We held a fascinating conversation with an Iranian intellectual who is head of the Iranian 5-year plan. The subject: Iranians when trained to teach head for the cities. The villages have nothing to hold them—mud huts and as our intellectual said sadly, “No amenities”.*

Accommodations secured and introductions completed, the advisitation process enters its third stage: the presentation of the touristic highlights of the host country. Tehran has been briefly introduced by the commute, which WVT conducts by foot from the apartment to the AID headquarters, and dinner at a pleasant local restaurant. But only one more day is scheduled in the capitol, and the visitor observes: “I’ve been two days in Tehran getting acclimated in a confusing environment where I have to understand what they mean.”

## MAY 11: TOURS

The tour of the country was scheduled for 9 days and begins with a flight to the city of Shiraz and the nearby historic site of Persepolis. The visitor is duly awed. “Incredible”, he writes. *13 high columns elaborately carved, surmounted by legendary beasts. 13 left of literally hundreds of columns that held the palace roof. Also there are remains of great courtrooms. All were destroyed by Alexander the Great, some say to please his courtesan who wanted to set fires after a drinking party. Bas relief remain on walls and two keep recurring to remind the viewer of the brutal nature of the age. One is a winged and sealed lion sinking his teeth into the haunch of an agonized unicorn. The other is a king sticking his sword into the belly of a mythical beast which has reared up on its hind legs. This was the realm of Darius, King of Kings, and Xerxes.*

Then back to Shiraz and reports of shimmering colors, glistening pools, blooming flowers, inspiring poems. Touring the park that hosts the tombs of poets Hafiz and Saadi, the visiting educator comes across *a beggar who holds a boy child with legs spindle thin from rickets. Seeing a tourist, he snaps open the boy’s mouth with a finger to point with piteous fawning to a supposedly aching tooth in the child’s mouth. I am told the beggars often rent such children. It is easy to believe and it helps you not to see him. So you believe it. If you don’t see him, he doesn’t exist for you. But the child exists.*

## MAY 13: VISITS

The visitors call on the Ostan Chief, the County Superintendent. *Underlings open doors, proceed us to the great man’s presence. He sits behind a king size desk*

*with no papers. Above him, pictures of the handsome Shah look down on us we proceed through our translator. He grants us permission to visit. We drink tea in glasses served by a deferential underling. All is ceremonial.*

*We visit the schools. A class of 21 year old girls in the 13 year program are learning to teach reading. I ask them where they want to teach. Unanimously, Shiraz. But first they must go to their Siberia, the villages, for several required years. If they survive, they may return to Shiraz. Out in the pest holes of the villages, there are no health facilities, toilets, or supervision of teaching. Survive three years and back to Shiraz. Meanwhile, 16 and 17 year old boys are also being trained in normal schools. They are village boys. Most intend to teach their required years and get out to Tehran or Shiraz. One tells me, "in this country, we lack dedication." And 70% of Iran live in hovels in villages.*

*Then to a school for training young men to teach in tent schools which move with the tribes. And a surprise! I am back in Oklahoma! These tribesmen are the equivalent of American Indians. They are strong, leathery, grave, tough, quiet, respectful. They live in a neat boarding school outside of town. They are quietly contemptuous of city Iranians who are, to them, corrupt, soft, cowardly, pale. I ask whether they would rather teach in Tehran, Shiraz, or with the tribes. They chorus: "With the tribes."*

*The leader of this training school is a son of a khan, a tribesman who came to America and studied Indian education. I asked him whether he is educating the 66 boys in his boarding school to be tribesmen or Iranians. He explains that it is between the two. But I see it as nearer to the tribe. He is an Iranian tribesman but he might well have been a Texan. He and our Iranian intellectual immediately take an unspoken but clearly communicated dislike to each other. Texas versus Harvard.*

*We visit a well equipped trade school in Shiraz. 21 different trades; Space; Equipment. And the enrollment is dwindling below 200 because, in Tehran, the minister's deputy decided to reduce the school from a six-year junior-senior school to a junior high alone. Boys now graduate at 14, too young for the trades they supposedly have learned, not allowed to enter even the vocational senior high school. Why not allowed? Who knows? They are not employed; They drift; They lose their skills. A blunder at the ministry: the engineer in charge wants to save money on the school. Why? To build more trade schools. Alice in Wonderland!*

*As the work day closes, we return to the Ostan Chief. He has gathered his subordinates. He has an audience. He talks and is translated for 1 1/2 solid hours. He is a superintendent. He has problems... The ministry, the teachers who did not read the manuals. 4:00 to 5:30. One gets tired of drinking so much tea. John Payne attempts to conclude and the chief says dolefully that Americans have not learned patience. We will come back, we say. Bring more patience, he says.*



## MAY 14: OUR SIDE

The visiting team is invited to dinner at the home of an AID official in Isfahan. *I honestly asked as we came up to the house, is this an apartment? He chuckled. New, beautiful construction, two full time servants, 4 bedrooms, study, three bathrooms, palatial living room, dining room, several balconies, garden, high walls, many books, etc. And a party: the assistant American counsel, the British consul, the Fulbright student from the English department at Ohio State with his beautiful wife, the American girl married to the Iranian, the aid men and women a sumptuous smorgasbord meal after many drinks... Quite an evening all in all. The British Counsel told me that he doubted the necessity of educating Iranian peasants who only happened to be about 75% of all the Iranians. Ed drove us home in his beautiful new American Chevrolet. A fine host along with his gracious wife.*

*Monday, we labored. The ceremonial call on the Superintendent, the labored translation, the slow progress, the curious students. The high or low spot was a visit to an emergency program for training teachers for the county villages. The battered chairs were occupied by 30 women huddled under their chadors (long body length shawls covering the head, clutched nervously to cover the mouth, covering the entire body to the dust) and 10 men. Ages: 16 to 21 about 17; 21 to 26 about 10; over 26 about 13. Average education: 7 to 9 years in school. Mostly villagers, mostly mothers. Due to teach at 100 rial (\$1.33) a day. I asked them what kept people from teaching in villages and guess what they said? Yes, money.*

*The teacher of methods of teaching math taught them to fold a paper in four, tear off 1/4 and teach the children that this is 1/4. They complied eagerly. They asked me what a teacher salary and life in America were like and I told them. As I did, I kept feeling so sorry for the starving New York teachers on strike and for my malnourished colleagues and their miserable salaries at NYU. We really have it tough in America. And the rugged living conditions in American homes abroad: things are tough all over, I guess.*

*At a good teacher education program for girls in their 13th year of education, the activity program had been introduced and had gone mad. Units, projects, charts, charts, charts! The girls proudly reported two projects via charts on walls. One was Foods of Iran. The charts showed magnificent foods, clipped from American magazines. The second was 'Life in Iran'. The charts contained pictures of an Iranian engineer's family at \$20,000 per year income. I gently suggested that the poverty-stricken children of the villages couldn't conceive of such foods and living. I suggested charts that would help improvement of living conditions. It was a new idea to the girls. They listened seriously, then told the translator of a great block to following this idea in the project. He translated. They would be unable to get pretty pictures to put on their charts if they followed my suggestion.*

## MAY 19: ON THE ROAD

*The road to Zahedan is a story of some experiences on the trip East in Iran to the corner of the world where Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan join. The road runs from Kerman to Zahedan. The road is used advisedly, for 400 miles east there is no other road. No road parallels it; No road crosses it. The gravel road of small broken stone and dust goes remorselessly East, across deserts, in the shadows of mountains, through winding mountain passes, through dead level straight ahead hours too.*

Throughout this section of their visit, in which he and his colleagues are taken across the desert from Isfahan to Zahedan, WVT most clearly endures the experience of being a stranger in a strange land. He learns, several times during this single long day, about the bounds and limits of control within the advisitorial process. Two jeeps conduct the group to the city of Bam, where an ancient town and castle are explored, accompanied by an enthusiastic band of local teenage boys. On returning to the point at which they had been dropped off, it was quickly seen that one Jeep had disappeared. But it returned, carrying the two drivers, who explained that they had business in town. The AIDS official raged at them. They had been told not to leave and there had been valuables left on the seats. One wag added, "drivers always have business in town," but this time they had lost much face.

*Back through the twisting alleys. But a Jeep was overheating, and as the drivers tinkered, another Jeep came by. A school man of Bam, a specialist on fundamental education (literacy). They were waiting for us. Dinner was "ready" at his house. The judge was there, and the agricultural specialist. He had word from the county superintendent that we were on route. We must stop.*

*We protested. We had planned to eat in the desert far along at a lonely stop for trucks. The outcome was foregone. We went to his house. It was a middle class, upper section, Iranian home. It was down a narrow, twisted, dusty street, one jeep wide. The door in the mud stucco wall opens and you are in the sanctuary, the house, and shortly in the garden. The garden has two stages, a gravel area with a pond surrounded by concrete slabs and small trees. Just beyond a wall another garden through which the jube flowed. At its meanest, the jube is a gutter through which grey water slowly sloshes. At its best, the jube is a near creek, also grey, but forceful in speed. Everything happens beside a jube. Clothes are washed; parts of people are washed; litter is disposed; dusty feet are dangled; children pee. Water is drawn for household purposes. Sophisticated people boil it for beverage. In the jube I washed with soap carefully laid by and dried with a towel on the tree.*

*The living room is spacious, perhaps 15 feet by 35 feet. As everywhere in Iran, from the pictures high on the wall, well beyond touch, two men look down. One is Ali, the dark eyed, bushy faced son-in-law of Muhammad. The other is the Shah in military dress, or smiling at his son, or stately with his wife, or peers. The Shah is everywhere. Over administrators' desks, he signs papers; in homes he gazes kindly*

at his son. Aside from these, there are small pictures of kids, and a shelf with a red gauze shell cover and a porcelain cat and implausible artificial flowers. Steel arm-chairs, like American porch furniture, are padded with heavy red felt bottom and back like old-fashioned parlor chairs in America. The floor is carpeted proudly wall to wall with one large Persian carpet.

The children are heard and briefly seen. They peep at the strange visitors from what they assume to be invisibility behind drapes, outside windows, or lattice work. And, miracle, the mother is briefly seen as she directs food preparation. This is because she is a home economics teacher and is modern and dresses modern. In the other two homes in which so far I have spent three hours each for meals, the women were never glimpsed. Of course, she does not sit down to eat with us. This would be carrying modernity too far. Between our arrival at 11:30 and 1:00 PM when the lunch that was "ready" was served, she prepares the food while we have tea and fruit in the living room. The board groans when we arrive.... We eat heavily and when we leave the table, the Americans, the judge, et cetera... 2/3 remain untouched. The mother, father, older children pose for our pictures. The 10-year-old boy has been the solemn deft and silent servant throughout the meal. The older girl only prepares and is not to be seen. In Iran, a hard time will be experienced by organizers of the League of Women Voters. But it is 2:00 PM, and the road to Zahedan leads east....

There is another level of the road to Zahedan that I hesitate to tell you about. But I must, for it is part of the truth and necessary to an honest narrative. I think you know, for you are highly sensitive to what I think, that I have been struggling against—let's call them—forebodings of personal disaster in connection with this trip with that part of my mind which has rejected spookery and supernatural manifestation since the time of my father's death when I was 15. I know that forebodings are part of mankind's overactive imagination, reflections of the temporary state of the psyche, pure and simple. A minority contender for my mind encourages me to wear my comedy-tragedy pin (and way of looking at the universe) on days when I need the breaks.

The camel of our light hearted jests (The traffic in Iran is heavier than in New York; Watch out for the trampling by the camel traffic) became in my mind the symbol of Nemesis, the embodiment of the foreboding.... At one gendarme checkpoint, a camel was tethered. I went over to look at him. Let no one tell you that the camel is a good, bland animal out of Walt Disney. Ask any camel driver. Camels are mean tempered, arrogant animals that hate men. I took his picture and he showed his teeth in a snarl and made unfriendly noises that combined the growl, snarl, and groan. The camel: my symbol of the road to Zahedan.

Several colleagues decide to be pictured riding the camel. Dave goes first. The camel snarled. Herb mounted, a beret atop his head. The camel grew angrier and pettier and noisier. I decided that I had taken enough from this camel with his spare teeth, his ugly sound, his nasty beady eyes, his hostility to life. So I mounted him too. The gendarmes forced him up and as one set of legs unfolded, I lurched up, and as

*the second pair unfolded, I lurched again. One holds front and rear on what passes for a pillow on the stack of old carpets that makes the saddle. A picture while I was up. Then the camel broke the string binding the saddle to the beast, alarming the gendarmes who could do nothing about it. The camel grew more hostile. They forced it down and I dismounted. . . some obscure necessity requiring me to tell death that life was to be lived fully till its end and the death for this individual or for the world was to be flaunted, denied even the courtesy of credibility, denied till it prevailed as it must. Meanwhile, ride the camel.*

## MAY 21: LUNCHING

Zahedan is reached, visited for a day, and then flown from back to Tehran. WVT reflects on Learnings from the trip: Health and time do divide us. *The Iranians work hard to cater to our strange notions at the hotel in Zahedan, the waiter before serving our Pepsi Cola and Canada Dry orange made sure, with pride, that we saw him as he conspicuously washed the glasses with great care in the courtyard pool the dozen lovely large goldfish that live in the quiet pool did not resent a bit being disturbed by the dipping of the glasses. As to time, it would never occur to the home economist wife of Bam that there was a courtesy conflict between the many dishes for lunch she felt that her obligation to serve us and the time factor, an hour and a half wait for lunch at midday with the desert yet to cross. The conflict which the American hostess would have immediately seen was no conflict at all to her she prepared all the dishes; we waited from 11:30 AM till 1:00 PM. She was a most gracious hostess. Desserts are more important than deserts.*

And in Zahedan, the Superintendent hosted the group for another 3 hour meal. *The wife at no time appeared. The Superintendent served Scotch and offers Winston cigarettes. He dresses in western style. He talks of the necessity of the hot lunch program. He complains of the central government. And his son serves, quick and silent as the cat. His women, daughters and wife, are carefully kept from the sight of his visitors. Have another Scotch before you go? More tea? Canada Dry?*

## MAY 23: NATIONAL CHARACTER

*The cultural historians debate whether national character exists. Meanwhile the Iranian character grows clearer and clearer and more and more difficult to crack. To reverse roles, imagine if you were an oriental sent to America to aid and faced with the problem of slowing Americans down to the oriental pace and developing A philosophy of fatalism in place of one of progress and forward movement. Your leverage is the educational system. How do you do it?*

*In the case of Iran, the problem is that the Iranian has no higher loyalty than to himself and his immediate family. Call it kindly individualism; Call it harshly opportunism or every man for himself. Call it what you will, it takes every form and is on every hand. No appeal to religion overpowers it; no appeal to patriotism whether in the form of national welfare or humanitarianism breaks through. Democratic*

values except individualism are not comprehensible sanitation for all and hold no charm.

Set side by side a centuries-old ability to adjust to the conqueror, the imperialist, and in time absorb him. Alexander destroyed their Persepolis; his warriors married Persian women; Persia absorbed the Greeks and went on. The Arabs conquered Persia and brought it the Muslim religion. The Persians developed a splinter religion based on Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, and made their deviant interpretations prevail. The Turks and the Mongols invaded; Persia absorbed them. Britain drove for India across Persia; Russia looked for warm water to the South. Iran acquiesced in their influence. America moved in. And again on the surface Iran accepted the newcomers. She did in a haphazard fashion what the newcomers wanted her to do. But she accepted because it was what they wanted; she did not do these things for herself, because they were things she wanted.

Add carefully wrought negative explanations as to why things cannot be done, neatly developed in the interests of face saving and you can understand what the students of national character find it necessary to say.... All of this lies behind our struggles. I, who will not stand in a line at a movie or a restaurant for 5 minutes in America, wait hours in Iran as inevitable forces delay planes, guests, ad infinitum. I who am economical with small talk in America spend long hours in the ceremonials of being received or being dined. I who value short answers preferably in writing ask the same questions over and over, as translated ably, completely understood, and have them neatly evaded and swamped with circumlocution. The task of adjustment and accommodation becomes mine. When in Rome.... You must; there is no alternative.

Some illustrations? Yesterday we met a group of Iranian Fulbrighters, science teachers in high school who had spent a year at least studying in America. They now teach science in Tehran high schools. We asked for their recommendations for people who would teach in positions similar to theirs. They replied with their problems. We urged recommendations. They replied with problems. We translated their problems (students are not interested) into recommendations (teach future teachers to know how to interest students) and ask for recommendations not problems. They replied with problems. The government should build great museums for the students to create interest. But we said, could they not make a simple museum exhibit with their students? Not possible; We have nothing. Not even stones? The government should do it, was the response. One hour—no runs, no hits. Ask a simple question; get a complex evasion.

Or in Zabedan. (In Zabedan did Kubla Khan no pleasure Dome decree, and Jube, the sacred river, runs with Iranian pee.) the Superintendent lives in a lovely house which cost considerably to build. He entertains lavishly in a region where, we heard, some Baluchis have been reduced literally to eating grass in order to survive the drought. He has a clean-cut philosophy of education period: Hot lunch. Give him power to administer the hot lunch money and the Baluchis and village people will attend school. Do not give him the administration of this money and they will



*not go to school. He can talk of no problems of curriculum, selection, other ways of recruiting. Only hot lunch. In America he would be calculating football receipts and entertaining the community elite.*

*Yet this letter is skewed so far. It leaves out many charming national characteristics. The pleasant humor of people when not defending or striving. The deep-rooted courtesy. The enjoyment of beautiful weather. The way they prize little gardens and carry flowers. The patience with adversity. The charm of the laughing children. The endless rote recitation by students memorizing as they walk. The endless fight against the encroaching dryness, against admitting the horror of the emptiness. The enraged dedicated few who feel immobilized. The helpfulness to strangers. They often seem themselves like strangely old, preternaturally tired wise children. We will see you again, we say. If Allah wills it, they respond. Fate is in charge and directs mankind.*

## MAY 25: THE VILLAGE

*Today we headed out in the omnipresent jeep with a handshake embossed on the door to find me a village. I put it this way—find me a village because I have been urging my good AID hosts since setting Jeep tread on the road to help get me inside a village to get the feel of it. I particularly wanted to get acquainted with an out-of-the-way village, not one accustomed to American eyes.... Our problem: can a literate person be expected to stay with village teaching or will he flee to cities?*

*At Tabriz my perceptive host, Paul Regan, at whose delightfully Americanized Iranian home I am staying from Thursday morning to Sunday morning, was amenable to my suggestion.... We headed back toward Tehran for 20 or so miles, then took a dirt road to the right toward mountains alternately striped with snow and coal black rocks. On our right ran an incredible red mountain and I mean red in the shadow, not sun, for it had become a threatening sky. When the red mountain ran out, it was replaced by a mountain of green, grey, and brown and shades between, great sedimentary masses like those of a surrealist artist which made-up the scene. Oxen pulled plows in the valley; 90% of the Iranian plowing of soil is by oxen.*

*The road soon stopped being a road and became a trail. The jeeps, however, are incredible. Our Jeep slithered down and up sheer hills, crossed fast flowing rivers, jolted and jumped through a long winding valley toward our village destination Cortana. We passed an agricultural normal school training for agriculture and elementary school teaching in villages, then no people except an occasional farmer plowing, a boy on a bike going who knows where, a shepherd with a mixed flock of sheep and goats.*

*Finally after about two hours, we saw the village lying below in a cleft of the hills.... The village was rock and plastered huts built into a steep rising hill. You thought of pueblitos though there were no ladders. The little children, dressed in simple dresses of varied faded colors and pants and torn shirts for boys, looked at us in astonishment. The adult men who looked piratical in black pants worn formerly white shirts and a variety of headgear from black hats to bound cloth, gathered as we*



*asked for the chief. They were mostly silent, responding to our interpreter who must have been more of a cultural shock than we were for he was impeccably business suit dressed while Paul and I were at least in sport clothes.*

*The chief wasn't in. The man answered questions. It was a village of 600. The school had been built five years ago. The farthest anyone in the village had gone to school was fifth year. No one had ever gone to school outside the village except the Mullah. All others were illiterate.*

*There were two institutions and two institutions only in the village and they are symbols of the fight between old and new going on in Iran. They are the school and the carpet factory. Our interpreter asked some 8 to 10 year-old boys, like everybody else on holiday Friday, Muslim style, what they did during the week. Seven out of eight said they worked in the carpet factory.*

*The carpet factory is the only modern building in the village. Small, of yellow brick, one floor, with roof vents, a few glass windows. It was locked. It was owned by an absentee landlord, the curse of Iran, and managed by his foreman. A few yards away was the school. Two rooms of mud and stone separated by an entrance hall. The small windows in each room giving insufficient light. Dirt floor, very dusty. Black long benches, whittled and scarred. Long black desks for the benches on which four could crowd. On the wall, a map of Europe. Up front, the teacher's table and chairs. Long pages for attendance records. Nothing more. No materials, no nothing. The light filtering into the darkness, the dust, the black scarred benches, the little room. The other room was its twin as we came out of the school into the light and offered cigarettes to the men who were amused that Paul's cigarettes showed a camel, though American. We talked outside the school. And along came a wizened old man, with graying beard, creased forehead, black leathery skull cap, tattered long brown coat over blue patch trousers. He was really an old man, about 45. Life expectancy in Iran is 52. Half of the children die before age 5. People fell back deferentially. Should we have tea? Of course. He was the old Mullah, the Muslim religious man who read religious books and can use the abacus.*

*We followed him up the hill to a hut no different from the rest. In the entrance hall, itself a small hut, a saddle was stored. He pushed open a door to an inner room. We took off our shoes and went in. It was a bare white plastered room with one floor to ceiling window which looked at the bare hillside across the valley that faced the hill village. It was, of course, unscreened and opened. On the floor were three Persian rugs, covering the entire area, wall to wall. Built into the plaster were two book shelves for the Koran and other religious books. On one wall, some tattered and faded pictures of his son and himself when young. By the window, a book that looked like a ledger and wasn't, an abacus, a few pieces of paper with Iranian writers which is of course, in Arabic. There was no furniture whatever.*

*The Mullah motioned us to sit on the floor on a pillow reserved for guests and lean our backs against a pile of Persian rugs in the corner. We engaged in small talk as*

*the tea was prepared. When it arrived, it took the form of a samovar, copper yellow and much used, some small tea glasses, a flowered plate into which you pour tea from glasses and drink, a copper tray. A young Mullah carefully and systematically made the tea which, as usual, was good. Another young Mullah with dark piercing eyes, Valentino cheek type with white termon, watched us carefully.*

*The old Mullah who sat and rocked his body as he talked was a wise man. We talked school; did he believe the Mullahs should teach schools? It proved that the old Mullah was his staunchest supporter of separation of church and state as any PO AO in the USA: Mullahs should stick to religious teaching. Teachers should teach in schools. But be friendly. He encouraged the teachers to tell him their troubles and he attempted to help. The teachers came from Tabriz, the city I was visiting. He said the seat teachers were satisfied. Could they be?*

*What did they need in Matanog, population 800? They now had a bathhouse but they needed more water supply. He understood in America people had electric blankets. He would like to know more of this. He had also heard we killed people by electricity. We asked him how bad people were handled in Matanog. Some were brought to the gendarmes. In other cases, the people handled the matter themselves through a third party. A theft for instance. What third party? Himself. He was also the judge. Where? This room.*

*Did the people vote? Yes, on occasion. Where? This room. They brought their ballots and left them on the floor of his room. Sometimes they reached this high. He demonstrated. On such a day he served much tea. In Iranian villages the landlords instruct the peasants whose names to write on the ballots. The names are always the landlords and his cronies. In villages where the people own part of the land their votes are bought for one or two taramon, 10 to \$0.20 by the landlords or other candidates.*

*What was our religion? He explained that Christ was respected by Muslims as a good prophet but not the Son of God. There is only one God and his name is Allah.*

*We talked a long time, about an hour, and then went back to the Jeep, surrounded by few villagers now. Where were they? We drove off and found out. We climbed out of the cleft to the valley plateau. From on high, we looked down to hundreds of sheep and goats and scores and scores of villagers milking the animals. The confused sound that rose to us sounded like cheering in a stadium. The economic system was simple. The shepherds and goatherds grazed the village animals during the day while the villagers worked in the fields. Each villager owned and recognized his own few animals. Each day the animals were milked. Every fortnight, the milk collected went to the herders who, in turn, sold it in the village. This was the herders' day. After milking, the lambs and kids which had been separated from the mothers were freed and with great noise raced 1/4 of a mile to find their mares and do as best they could with the remainder. To see from a mountain top the race to join the main herd and to hear the bellows was an amazing experience. We sat silently in the Jeep, eating our sandwiches. Such peasants eat bread and yogurt, an agriculture man later told me.*

*They eat meat once in two weeks, if lucky. They drive their flock to market in Tehran annually. The train takes 15 hours for the same trip; The plane two hours. How long do they take?*

## MAY 27: COUNTING THE DAYS

*I do my job effectively, if quietly, and wake each morning to count the days like prayer beads and wish I were home. The break-even point refuses to come. For instance 18 down, 32 to go. Remind me please not to accept direction of this project for the ensuing five years. It might slip my mind. Seriously, I am almost always lonely for you.*

## MAY 30: ILLNESS AND HEALTH

*Since my return to Tehran on Sunday, I have had my first illness. It was a combination of stomach cramps and chills and fever. Sunday night I consumed aspirin and bufferin; they piled blankets upon me; I quaked into the night and rose in the morning in adequate health to continue work at home in the form of studying documents. Tuesday, we had an AID conference at which twenty of us Americans sat around and shared ideas on what does not work in developing Iranian attitudes and the desire to do things for themselves.*

*Tuesday night at dinner, we had an amusing incidental meeting with an American who was leaving for home that day. A frequent conversational gambit in Iran among Americans is how much longer will you be here? I leave in 29 days. Is that so? I'm starting my second two year hitch. They sound like genteel residents of Alcatraz passing the time of day. He was an NYU graduate in public administration, a former Washington lawyer and lobbyist. I asked politely, what has been your work here? He said, I have been tax adviser to the Ministry of Finance. There was silence with things going on in it. I said with restraint, this might possibly be the most discouraging current assignment in Iran. He said, that is the understatement of the year.*

*He told us some stories of taxes in Iran....His primary story was of how they discovered that a person might go to the equivalent of the motor vehicles bureau with money in hand to pay for his auto license. Yet the process would take two to three days of his time in attendance. So he and his associates, horrified, streamlined it so that it would take 30 minutes or less for issuance. Pleased with the new system well installed, they returned to their work in the Ministry of Finance. Five months later they rechecked on the workings of their new system. They found that it had been abandoned and that the old system of two or three days was back in force. Why? He explained delicately, "The new system did not give the officials time enough to negotiate on the costs involved."*

*In this setting the reactions of Americans are varied and fairly predictable after you come to know their pattern. Here's a series: the director of the education branch*

of AID is Clarence Hendershot, a small persistently pleasant man who is an international career man of about my age. He has learned to follow the rules carefully, to pay attention to protocol, to be patient, to repeat, to expect little, to delegate, to avoid detail work. To like to hold meetings. There is Dave Laird, his right hand man, a former California school administrator, white haired, often quite wise. He is worried about the fact that the campaign to eliminate illiteracy from the villages is not accompanied by concern about the 15% who need to think our way and be the leaders of life in Iran. Literacy alone could open the way for the devastatingly simple and successful pamphlets of the communists. He always looks for a middle way, part Iranian, part American. He explains the custom of superintendents and principals keeping money they save from school expenses for their own use as a native and different way of financing the salaries of people above the teaching level. It is a comprehensive tolerance. Understand the pattern of relationships, he advises. Know what is possible within the system. The field man assigned to the counties or special tasks all varied. Quiet Paul Regan who thinks more than he says; Charles Dove, divorced from a wife who refused (I hear) to come back for a second hitch; Hans Burgie, naively outraged that people don't behave as they say they believe; Sherman, bitter, unhappy, enraged at government both Iranian and American.

In this setting we of the NYU group proceed each other in our characteristic ways. John Payne is not only the team captain; I attribute to him the characteristics of a fullback. He plugs along day after day, hour after hour, attempting to talk to as many people as possible over as long a period as possible. He talks to them by day; he writes at night. As far as I can tell, he has had no day or half-day free in all the seven-day weeks he has been in Iran which is, of course, not an excellent pattern for a man who I understand had a heart problem in his health background. He doesn't see the need for shaping recommendations as early as possible and then trying these out with people, but instead he spreads a wide net and asks for all ideas his interviewees can muster. John fights off fatigue and stomach upset and keeps plugging away, and his system seems to work. Over the past few days, he encountered an Iranian version of our contract which held that the contract contained no provision for a per diem to cover our expenses while in Iran. We had been promised by NYU \$15 a day in Tehran for lodging, food, cabs, etc. And \$11.00 on the road. He got the Iranian AID run around so, like a good fullback, he walked it through. His succession: Hendershot, Laird, the Comptroller, the legal office, back to the comptroller's office, back to the legal office, back to the comptroller's office. We will not pay. After a day and 1/2 he wired Andy to get the NYU legal office to review the contract with Washington.

John goes to places where people have arranged to meet him and waits. One of two things happens: they are late or they are waiting at another place. So he goes to the other place or places. Fortunately in Tehran there are few places. They are our apartment where I often work as often as I can; the Aban building, our headquarters, the annex, the embassy, the ministry. Surely he will find his appointment at one of these places. The Americans, incidentally, have gone Iranian in this respect.

*Paul Regan made an appointment with the Fulbright American for us to talk to Fulbrighters at the US Information Service office from four to seven on a Tuesday. We went there. The meeting was at Fulbright offices 5 to 8. The day was right; it was Tuesday.*

*Herb Schwartz is our amiable science education man. He is humorous and pleasant, interested in philosophies of teaching science, good in person to person situations. He takes voluminous notes on everything; he is our Thomas Wolfe, our total recall. He is our shopper. He buys and buys: some of ours, rugs, vases, candlesticks, jewelry, whips, a Turkestan jacket, and so on and so on and so on, and mails it all back to the States in small or gigantic cartoons. He looks into shops while I look at people.*

*How do they perceive me? Probably as a person who on frequent occasions requires time to be alone. I walk alone, I write, I find a reading corner. As a person who is doing a job with moderate intensity but no great relish. As a person who has read a lot by now on Iran and is close to final conclusions for survey purposes. As a person uncomfortable without structure. As a sharp onlooker but one who has too many doubts to identify with anything or anyone in the situation. As one who believes with the Iranians, who may have assimilated me unwittingly, that things are more complicated than most people think.*

## JUNE 1: FATIGUE

On the 1st of June, WVT adds to the listing of the date an ironic quote: “yes, Virginia, there is a June!” On June 3rd, he adds to the dates listing: “half down, half to go!” Memorial Day is remembered, if not celebrated, a swimming pool is found and used, breakfasts and cocktail parties are scheduled. An evening at the movies, along with Herb; visits to museums. An opportunity to meet with visiting Americans to talk about American education; the presentation of an invited lecture on his most recent book, The Making of a Modern Educator. And then, for the first time in nearly a month, a day off from the project!

The recognition dawns that the NYU group has run out of steam and needs to slow its pace. (But not team leader John, who schedules meetings for himself in Ahwaz the day the thermometer hits 115 degrees.). WVT’s letters begin to fill with touristic descriptions and observations of forays into Tehran and musings as to which title it best deserves. There’s the Paris of Asia, but the chaos of its street life suggests to him that it might better be called the Los Angeles of Asia. By June 8, his annotation of the day is lengthened to “Friday the Muslim Sunday; June 28 at 5:00 AM I leave; the third day off of 31.”

## JUNE 8: MEETING THE CONTRACT

*The time has come when the jaunts, long as the road to Zahedan or short as yesterday’s to Dardasht, literally “place in the desert”, are ending. We turn now to the hard*



*intellectual work of any survey: determining about 50 recommendations, phrasing them tightly, defending them each for a page or so in a land of contradictions where statistics are lacking, wrapping all into the survey report....*

*In the beginning there was the Ministry of Education. I suspect in the end there will be the ministry. Physically, the ministry is a set of interrelated chunky buildings separated by pleasant formal gardens. Humanly the ministry is an aggregation of mutually suspicious human beings, a number indeterminate even to the paymaster because some on the payroll never put in an appearance at the ministry building. Some say they could not, even if they wished, since they are shades. Others are tangible, but outs who remain on the rolls. One brave researcher has estimated 700 employees of whom more than 200 are servants.*

*Let us start with the latter group and work up to His Excellency. The servants are illiterate and hospitable. They sit in the hallways before office doors and droop until a visitor comes by. They then make honest gestures of welcome, indicate great servility, and pull aside the green curtain admitting you to the outer office of whatever great man. They are seeing no more till departure, because higher level servants bring tea when one enters the inner sanctum.*

*In the outer office, low level officials spin and toil over various long hand writings which are interminable. A single secretary presides over a single typewriter with great dignity and loftiness. She wears modern dress. There are books on the walls and impressive stacks of documents, a word pronounced by Americans and Iranians alike with great savor and relish. As, for instance, I must go and work on documents.*

*From the inner office one reaches the conference room. All great men have conference rooms. Sometimes the conference room contains the great one's desk dominating the room with its size and opulence. Sometimes the conference room is separate but always with large stuffed chairs often with red brocade and elaborate design. The rooms are large.*

*The great one, if influenced by East and not West, sits behind his desk during the audience. He speaks long and sonorously and the translator interprets to the visitors on the stuffed chairs set in an irregular circle away from his desk. If Western influenced, the great one leaves his desk and sits with the common ones in the circle which looks onto his desk. Thus he shows his democracy. Sometimes he lets subordinates talk. Thus he shows his grasp of participation.*

*The great one expresses his pleasure at the opportunity to put himself at the visitor's service. The visitors express their pleasure that in his ceaseless duties the great one has with great effort found time to see them. The ministry closes for the day at 2:00 PM. Tea is served by a deep bowing, shabbily dressed servant. Tea biscuits calling back social teas of my childhood are served. Cakes are served. More tea is served. The Persian word is tarooף, meaning ceremonial politeness. Much tarooף.*

*The major questions are asked. Often the great one attempts to learn what the visitors prefer him to do so that he may agree politely and admire the ingenuity of this*



idea. Certainly this will be carried out! On such occasions the naïve visitor leaves, happy, mission accomplished. All is go, he thinks. Nothing whatever results. Months later he inquires: Why? He learns, it was not possible. Or unfortunately there was not the money! Or no support could be found. It is delicately implied that other officials intervened. No one's feelings are hurt by this process. Persians do not say 'no.' It is rude. Nor do they say, 'I do not know.' One must not lose face.

The experienced visitor phrases his question in such a way as to keep the great one free from knowing what he wants. The great one indicates that there is much to be said on all eight sides and waits for the visitor to tip his hand. They bargain in this way on ideas as merchant and buyer bargain in the bazaar....

Toward the close the great one indicates that there might be a possibility that one of the eight possibilities might be preferable but one never knows because the future is unknowable and events, he says, are in the hands of Allah. The visitor satisfied, departs. Occasionally, something then results. Not often. Sometimes.

Ministries come and go. When a minister falls, all down to the level of principles throughout the country but not including principals become the outs. They go back to being professors at the university of Tehran, teachers in cities, workers for AID, Peace Corps, Fulbright. Skillful politicians stay on the payroll. A new group becomes the ins, giving up their duties temporarily as professors at university of Tehran, teachers in cities, workers for AID, Peace Corps, Fulbright. Skillful politicians stay on the payroll. Rather nice arrangement....

I have met the three top men. Minister #1 was the leader of the teacher organization that successfully struck a year ago. Salaries were almost doubled and he was made minister. He looks like a hard bitten American politician. His right hand man looks a bit like Harpo Marx and talks like an American. His opponents say he does not practice what he preaches but has learned to preach well for American ears. The third power is the Farley- Curley- Lewis Howe- Robert Kennedy of Iran. Rich, personable, persuasive, friend of the Shah, he heads vocational education and skillfully sabotages training vocational teachers in favor of turning out engineers through teacher training institutions. He struggles to build expensive vocational schools which are not used and scarcely attended through lack of teachers to man them. So he builds new unused schools, Pharaoh's monuments in modern dress.

Here is a typical administration struggle. With American planning and funds, plus person funds, a Center for vocational education was planned and built at Dardasht, 20 minutes from Tehran in the baking desert. Elaborate vocational shops— not to be confused with industrial arts—automobile, foundry, machine shop etc., about 8 in all. About 40 classrooms seating about 30 students each. Auditorium. Big gym. Big circular cafeteria. Big administration building. Right for vocational education.

In Tehran is a teacher training institution for vocational education called Tehran Institute of Technology. At insistence of the third man, it gives dual degrees in

teaching and engineering. So almost all of its students want to be engineers. Only five out of 20 want to go with an institution in the fall when it moves to Dardasht where it belongs, rather than transfer to technical engineering courses which remain in Tehran. A vocational high school is to be established at Dardasht too.

Thus, in the first year, the new facility at Dardasht, built for vocational education, will stand partly idle. It will be used only by a new Tehran Institute of Technology class of 100 and 200 high school students. It's built for about 1500. So, reasons the second man, let us transfer the teachers college, now housed in a rented hotel to Dardasht for next year. As the vocational school expands, using the magnificent shops as intended, the teachers college will withdraw. But will it, once the camel has his nose in the tent? Withdraw to where? Who knows? Perhaps new buildings. The third man wants the school to be vocational, engineers only. Put beds in the classrooms and tell the teachers college we have no room. Make it a boarding school. The second man wants it to be the place for the teachers college despite vocational layout. Not enough classrooms? 1/4 of a mile away is a new high school for the youth of the community, just being completed. The second man saw it on a visit to Dardasht a few days ago. We will take over this high school building for the college too. This will give us enough room.

It is June 8th. Dardasht vocational center stands in its place in the desert. Completed, each single shop costs \$200,000; there are eight shops. Each has top American and German machines installed. It opens in September. It has no director or student body yet. No one knows whether it will be a vocational center or the home of teachers college. The nearby high school, approaching completion, will open in the fall. It has no principal, no staff, and no student body. "We will take over this high school for the college too."

The first man, the minister, makes an announcement. "No decision will be made on Dardasht until we have the recommendations of the NYU team." The NYU team, learning to play Iranian, say, "But we are not building site experts." "We will await your pleasure," says the minister. "There is plenty of time."

## JUNE 13: THE FINAL REPORT

As he writes this letter, WVT continues to recover from his illness, and the team moves toward an agreement on its recommendations. *The difficulty is less that there are disagreements among ourselves; we have a fairly broad ideological base of agreements. The difficulty is instead that recommendations are hard to develop because of lack of money in Iran, the amazing lack of data and information, and the way one approach affects another. We had, for instance, an eminently sensible plan for training village teachers through a village curriculum in a rural setting for use in village schools. But the authorities say they have no money for building schools of this sort and have an excess of high school graduates for whom there isn't room in jobs and who must be used up somehow, preferably by mandatory assignment to teach in villages. But the high school graduates are city-bred, hate the idea of going*

*to the villages, even hate the idea of teaching, have no village contacts or sympathy or insight. Those we interview and who advise us come to the recommendation that our suggestion is not workable. So far our recommendations on rural elementary, for instance, have gone through six drafts. We now have a proposal—till we meet the next analyst who will expose the flaw in this one too.*

*Herb works on recommendation conferences until he can absorb no more. His threshold is lower than John's by far, and mine to some degree. Then he says in the midst of discussion, "I've got to stop talking. I don't care what we decide anymore." So we adjourn for a few hours; then back to it. Looking back, I can see that our humor is technically called gallows or jailhouse humor. Herb stopped by and contributed some more. He told of a supervisor who told him the only thing this country can do is start all over again. Remind me someday to tell you about how we still haven't gotten our per diems and how they can't give us our tickets home because travel orders can only be ordered after a job is finished and we haven't finished our job, have we?*

*Here, in Tehran, I am really a cheerful appearing soul, a specialist in such humor as we have. The American hostesses like me for I am very charming and gracious. We have dined out at an American home Sunday and Monday nights. I am an excellent guest. I make excellent flat and quacking contributions to all conversation and save much faith. The only trouble is my heart isn't in it.*

## JUNE 17: APPRECIATION

*I think I may have been unfair to the Iranians in some of my earlier letters and this worries me for, if anything, I try to be a fair man so I will be constructive and look for the good in what is here. However, this may be a short letter. But I will start bravely. Iranians are kind and hospitable. They take you in and gorge you. They go shopping with you and bargain for you. They wait for you. So they also have infinite patience. They enjoy simple pleasures such as strolling the boulevard at dusk. You seem safe among them. No hoods claim turf as their own; no one talks or acts ugly. They walk slowly, breathe deeply, and endlessly they talk and talk and talk. They are often like children. They have humor. They laugh with you even if they don't quite understand. They smile readily. They like people. Good at rapport. They are unfailingly polite. So they do not drink. It is evil and the Koran forbids it. So some say about 10% of them take opium, but I see no evidence at all. All of us, from Huxley down, have our own versions of soma. They sometimes seem a bit confused. But who doesn't? I said they were patient. It's true. We take a car and visit somewhere for four hours. The drivers wait. They drive us home. They say thank you in broken English. They drive another American and wait. They get pushed around. So they develop techniques of adjustment. And these are so effective that the Barbarians get mad. And when we tell them of their techniques of adjustment, they agree and add politely that there is no hope for whatever for Iranians.*

*Is there hope for you, American? They never asked the question, at least not out loud; they sniff flowers, cultivate their gardens. Their walls are seven feet high which,*

*of course, is higher than Everest. Stay out. Do not even look in. Those who live in the villages want to live in the cities. Those who live in the cities want to live in Tehran. Those who live in Tehran want to live abroad. They best like wishful wishes; Reality spoils things. They must dream a lot. In their miniatures, old men are comforted by young girls. Their intellectuals regard life as a great joke that has been played on them. They enjoy telling the joke again and again and do not resent it. Some intellectuals are dedicated and intended to work hard for something they are sure will not come about. They are few, intense, and very Iranian. They like Americans. They enjoy their informality. They also think, and quite correctly, that some of the Americans are phonies. They have discovered that some Americans aren't competent. They laugh with delight when I say with mock seriousness we should invite you to America to be a foreign technician advising New York University on its program. They admire our hard work. The pages which Americans cover with words! We wonder they are a successful people, not like us, the poor lost Iranians.*

*Their skies are blue. Their days follow a pattern and seldom change. They talk on. Tomorrow has always come and will tomorrow too. Birth and death are part of Allah's will. Enjoy the day; smell the rose; smile; pretend you know more of Hafiz and Saadi than you do, for it will do no harm. Make your street cries melodious and people may buy. Blanket the newcomer; absorb him; do not resent him. Live for the day. Tomorrow comes but is not yet real. Things here are very old. We are an old civilization. We do not amount to much but we survive. We may even be here tomorrow after bombs. But it would be nice to live in your country. So rich. Such new things to see. And we would not have to work hard. People sit at desks and earn great sums.*

*Not so short a letter after all.*

## JUNE 25: AND NOW...

*And now we come to my truly last long letter from Iran. For now our work has reached its culmination, at least its Iranian culmination within Iran. And from being by standards and observers of the wheels within wheels within wheels, from being those who stand on the brink watching others struggle in chaos, we ourselves become one of the wheels, we ourselves get pulled into the murky convolutions of chaos. For now we make our recommendations and we tumble into the pit of academic international politics.*

*How does one report from Chaos? He can't report how to get out, for no one in Chaos truly knows, that being one of the better definitions of Chaos. But at least he has some recollection of how he fell, jumped or was pushed in, as the coroner's report puts it.*

*In the beginning there was the word. So let's start with the contract. It was wrought in the USA, somewhere in the bowels of the great digestive system of New York University and Washington bureaucracy. It was wrought, no doubt, by a good American citizen, or committee of citizens, who had never seen Iran and who write*

*pure English. Yet the contract is written in the most delightful Iranian. It would please the heart of any good Iranian who is attempting successfully to be all things to all men.*

*Our contract plainly says that we as a survey team are to do three quite different and mutually contradictory things. Clear? As an advance party, we need only explore the territory lightly and always be sure that we so proceed as to clear the way for the in-depth approach which follows upon our scouting. But interpretation 2 says there are four specific areas in the wide realm of teacher education that we conquered completely and report on sagely. But interpretation 3 reveals the survey team as Superman conquering the total picture of teacher education in its entirety, missing no nook nor cranny, rendering the judgment of Solomon, and the devil take the advance party concept.... What happens when one force in the complex of forces expects one to follow one interpretation and another force expects another interpretation and a third plays sphinx? Always the apple in Eden.*

*Back home at the ranch, uncle Andy and uncle George and all our little cousins of the New York University happy family are licking their chops and waiting for us to bring home the bacon. To them we are a brave scouting party, inspecting the terrain, avoiding ambushes, at all costs clearing the way for the coming NYU invasion.*

*But come now gentlemen!... Are we not scholars? Are we not dedicated to the truth? Shall we not speak out? And if a contract is not forthcoming, why then the devil with it! But softly, gentlemen. Thus thinking, the scouting party approached the passes and the potential ambushes.*

*The strategy was clear. Watch out for the Iranians. Play Solomon, yet be reasonable with their viewpoints. After all, it is their country. Remember? Onward group process!*

*Out of a pass came Taslimi. He's the deputy minister who looks like Harpo and talks like an American. It's a hung jury on whether he practices what he preaches. At two long conferences we explain our views, all to our basic principles, make concessions on smaller points in the name of realism. And Taslimi joins us. He becomes Tonto, the good Indian. We have a love feast.*

*But hark! Out of the pass comes another deputy, Nafisi. He's the one who combines Farley and Kennedy and could charm an Eskimo into installing air conditioning at the North Pole. He explains that we have neglected him, that he has seen many of us only socially. So we give him two days and he shows us his fortifications. He has a strange penchant for building magnificent buildings with good equipment and he trains no teachers who know how to keep people in his buildings or know what it is to do with his equipment. We skirmish. He retires back into the hills to think some more. He may be neutralized; He's not sure; We are not sure.*

*We proceed cautiously into the mountains, bravely showing our tentative recommendations to Iranians we encounter. Sometimes we have confused skirmishes but*



*there is no real favoritism shown by the Iranians and fortunately we have Tonto with us on our side.*

*We enter a deep defile. The noise of powerful forces! We look up alarmed. But joy quickly spreads. Riding toward us on their powerful steeds come our allies, the Americans, the AIDS education professionals of Iran. Support has come to us. Victory is ours! NYU, the contract and the truth forever! Viva USA. Oh say can you see?*

*At the head of the column, wearing his Mounties uniform is General Hendershot. At his right, out of a Nelson Eddy operetta, is Dave Laird. In the ranks are our buddies with whom we have been eating, drinking, traveling. Good old dawn of business education! Good old art of trades and industry!*

*But something strange is happening. Bullets began whizzing by us. We warily look about for hidden Iranians. Then the horrid truth dawns. The American AID troops are shooting at us, their own people! They invited us originally to take part in this war. They housed and equipped us. We are buddies. These are our boys! What the hell?*

*We take to the hills and escape under the cover of night. We regroup our thin, pitifully ragged band. We try to figure it out. Why this rigorous, slashing, intolerant attack on our most basic recommendations? Why, of all things this sharp assault by Hendershot who initiated the treaty, even the sacred first contract, that brought these peer conscripts to this barren land?*

*I have a revelation. Back home on the AID international ranch there is a new boss, Macy. Macy has changed the party line. Out the window with NYU. Let us build a Persian Empire through AID troops alone. So Hendershot must change with the party line. The easiest way to justify the shift? Easy. The recommendations are no good. The report is no good. We don't need NYU. And what happens to us back at our ranch when we don't bring back the bacon for the hungry chaps? And that precious bubble, reputation?*

*Our suspicion darkens as Hendershot, under a flag of truce, comes to visit our camp and blasts the recommendations. Treason? Benedict Arnold! We fight gallantly and wearily, a tired little band. The truth—I use the word timidly, for here truth is slippery—begins to appear as to why the American AID attacks, not aids, its loyal ally. They believe the gallant scouts are too conservative, not bold enough in recommendations. Naturally we disagree. We are steering, we honestly believe, a way that reconciles boldness and realism. Also there is our old friend semantics. We want village youth to teach village people through a village-oriented curriculum.*

*We say it is bold. They say it is conservative. This is probably the country and the place in which to point out that one man's need is another man's Persian.*

*We were on the watch out for Iranians. So we wrote to them and in their language and step by step we would have a fighting chance for implementation. We didn't write for American consumption. But General Hendershot says that if we are to give him a weapon he can use, it must be written for Americans too, with long*



*explanations of backgrounds of education in Iran and the findings of the team and many and so forth. And if not, no contract. The general has a large gun there.*

*So under a flag of truce and tired from the long fight and the surprise attack, we try to gather more data to shape back at the ranch, in overtime no doubt. Meanwhile we met a whole passel of Iranians today at Dry Gulch, the ministry. We gave them our recommendations. They reacted impassively as the Sphinx. Tonto wasn't with them. He had disappeared.*