

these were not people who were talking to Amnesty International or trying to make a splash in the press during the revolution. This was in 1971, '72, '73, when such talk was dangerous, but they confided in me as a friend, when perhaps they could not confide in other Iranians.

Q: That's very interesting. To what extent did the teachers share those attitudes or have similar problems?

Metrinko: Teachers had their problems. To what extent they shared the attitudes-- when I went back in 1977 to Iran, after having been away for a couple of years-- I had left Iran in '73 and came back once on a vacation in 1975 and saw old friends. Went out to the school again. Came back again in 1977 and immediately got in touch again with my friends there. People with whom I'd had correspondence, with whom I had visited, kept in touch with. By '77 there was a great deal of anti-regime sentiment expressed very openly, even by top administrators of the college. This would have been in early '77. April, May, that period. And a lot more open talk about what had happened to various students. That's when I learned that one of my old students had died in prison, for example.

Q: Was there support for the Shah evident also?

Metrinko: Support for the Shah-- there were very few people who

felt any support in their hearts for the Shah. Support for the Shah was something mandated from above. Let me give you an example. In the year 1970 in the town of Songhor there was a holiday-- I think it was the Shah's birthday or the celebration of the day that he had been saved from assassination, one of those holidays. I have a picture of-- I took photographs of the dancing and the sort of speechifying that was going on in the central square of the town. And somebody also gave me a picture of myself standing there, that they had taken when I hadn't noticed it. But I was standing talking on the far edge of the crowd to a local official, who was a bank official, and he spoke quite a bit of English. He was the other person of the town whose English was okay. The English teacher spoke excellently, beautiful English. This guy spoke decently. And we were standing there chatting at the far fringes of this crowd. Somebody was giving a speech in the center. And we couldn't hear a word of the speech. Just about every minute the man would say, "Shahanshah Arya Mehr" [king of kings, light of the Aryans], the title of the Shah, and everybody in the crowd would burst into clapping, including my friend who was talking to me the whole time. And after about four or five of these incidents of everyone bursting into clapping, I said, "Why are you clapping? You don't know what he's saying." He looked at me and said, "If I don't clap, I'll be in prison tonight." He might have exaggerated it slightly, but I'm not sure. As an official, he had to clap, and as an official he would have been asked why he

hadn't been clapping.

But it was that sort of control, that sort of-- when you say, you know, support for the Shah, you could always get a thousand or two thousand or a hundred thousand people to clap and to yell "Bravo" and "Long Live the Shah," but an awful lot of people thought of it as sort of a joke that they had to go through. Just like all the pictures of the Shah on everyone's wall.

Another comment about that, something that I heard in Tabriz in the year 1977. I was talking to a factory owner about one of the normal marches, you know, in honor of again one of the Pahlavi holidays, and he mentioned that he'd had to send twenty or thirty of his workers to the march, carrying placards of support. And I said, "Well, why do you do that?" You know, he'd mentioned that he practically had to close his factory down in order to do this, and how much trouble it was to get machinery started again and other things. I said, "Well, why do you do it?" He said, "We have to. We're given orders to do it." I said, "Well, suppose you didn't. What would happen?" He said, "Well, now the way things are, probably nothing would happen to me immediately, but when I have to go into the tax office at the end of the year, I would find that my assessment had gotten doubled or trebled. I'd have other problems of a bureaucratic nature like that." He said, "It's just not worth the hassle." That's how you get a crowd in Iran. And it seems to be true today too.

Q: Again, was SAVAK's presence pretty evident in this area also, in Mamezan?

Metrinko: There were officials at the school whom the students told me worked for SAVAK. There were students at the school who were practically ostracized, whom it was believed worked for SAVAK. Just before I had gotten there, in the year 1970 in the school, there had been a big round-up of students who were accused of being anti-regime, and that had seriously affected the school. Quite a few people were taken off to prison. And it continued sporadically the whole time I was there. I could think of several students, including the one who was killed in prison, who simply disappeared, and somebody would come and empty out their lockers or empty out their possessions in their room and that would be that. That's the SAVAK presence.

Q: Now you mentioned you spent a lot of time with the students on the campus. Did you have much contact with the townspeople?

Metrinko: Very, very constant contact. I met by chance-- well, not by chance, I met several people on the campus working in offices who were from the village. It was really a large village rather than town. And got to be friends with them. Was invited to their homes frequently. Spent as much time in village houses as I did on the campus. And that included a whole range of social activity. Everything from, you know, just going over for

dinner to frequently just sleeping in their houses. The contact, as I say, has continued.

Q: Did they have similar views to the central government, say compared to the people of Songhor?

Metrinko: Basically yes. There was a great deal of disdain for the central government. Also a lot of fear. A lot of the property around the town was under dispute. This had been an area that up until the late sixties had been rather remote. It was thirty, forty miles from Tehran, but in the days before everyone had cars and trucks, this didn't mean much. When cars and trucks became very, very common, in the late sixties and early seventies especially, the land in that area became very attractive. The Shah had a way of rewarding officials. Land that was foundation land, that belonged to the religious foundations or any of the government foundations, which was basically government controlled, such land would be given on a long term lease to officials as a bonus. Well, a fair amount of the land in this area fell under that foundation title. It had been bequeathed in years past-- you know, centuries past-- to either religious group foundations or had just become public property. And there was a very big dispute between the villagers there, when a large area of land they had always considered village land, public land for grazing, was suddenly given to a general and his wife. The woman was a high official, and became

the Minister of Education. She was later executed, after the revolution. But the story that I heard in 1971 was that when she and her husband received this land as their bonus, they simply sent soldiers to clear out the villagers from the area. There was a gun battle, other problems. But that was the sort of thing that went on. This is after the White Revolution, by the way.

So when you have people, villagers, who are being forced off land that they'd considered theirs for centuries-- sort of like the enclosures in England. You know, suddenly being forced off by representatives of the regime, by generals, by ministers. And everyone knew who it was. You know, she was there. Her husband was there. His soldiers were there. You can't expect them to have a great deal of attachment to the central regime.

Q: No. Now from your vantage point at the college, what was your assessment of the work of the Literacy Corps?

Metrinko: Superb. Absolutely superb. When I was in Songhor I visited a large number of villages in the Songhor area. The way the school system worked was that almost every village had a school of sorts. It could be one mud brick room. And either a member of the Literacy Corps was assigned there to teach for two years or somebody was assigned there-- somebody, for example, in the Songhor area, one of the teachers from Songhor. Somebody who had not yet gotten his university degree, just had a high school diploma, but had been in the Literacy Corps, would be assigned to

teach in one of the villages. I got to know quite a few of these guys and would go out visiting for weekends. You know, either go out by-- well, go out by jeep or walk out or go out on a motorcycle. A couple of hours from Songhor. Just spend the weekend. The social life was such that a bunch of teachers would do it at the same time. All basically people in their twenties, young guys would get together in one house in this village or that village or the next one. But I got to be close friends with a couple of the teachers, two or three in particular, and would go out to their villages frequently. It was really going back to medieval times. No electricity. No running water at all. Not even pumps. I mean, you used the stream. Or a well that somebody had dug. And basically cooked over a little kerosene heater or charcoal. But talking to those people, who were out teaching, seeing what they were doing-- you know, literally just seeing students who-- young village boys, girls, who would study in that village schoolroom until they were in the eighth grade, but seeing that they were learning to read and write Persian, in addition to their local Kurdish, and also seeing the effects of that on the students that I had in my first year in Songhor--

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Metrinko: But basically the effects that I could see in the students that I was teaching in high school-- in the students that I saw in these villages-- it was just an amazing thing. The

country was slowly becoming literate. And these were all students who perhaps would not use their educations later, but in many, many cases they did. I could see them. The village boys, especially the boys, because it's a male society, a male dominated society, but the village boys who grew up in small mud houses-- you know, living a medieval life-- getting to the point where they were literate enough to come to a school in a town. And then many of them going off to universities. And I could just see it happening. Without the Literacy Corps, it would not have happened. I know a fair number of people who grew up in circumstances like that and are now highly educated.

I was also very, very impressed-- I'm normally a cynic, but I was highly impressed by the college I was teaching in. The students, all of whom had been former teachers, were very committed, very dedicated, and becoming more and more politically committed too. And the staff was also excellent. It was a small college, but it had extremely good potential.

Q: You said you had some contacts with other Peace Corps volunteers in Iran. What kind of work were they doing?

Metrinko: A variety of things. In the area that I was in people were basically teaching. There were a whole series of towns and we would meet every few months. There were a couple of volunteers that I would see more frequently, about once every three weeks or so. But teaching, a lot of agriculture work. I

had one friend who was assigned to the Department of the Environment and he was basically involved in-- not animal husbandry, but he was involved in the park system and the maintenance of the rare animals that the Iranians were trying to bring back. They were doing quite a bit of work with bringing back the lions that were native to Iran, with other animals. Certain types of deer, certain types of sheep. And there were park preserves. So one friend was very much involved in that. He was a roommate of mine too for about a year and a half. Two years, sorry. People involved in agriculture. We had-- I remember one person who played in a symphony. But it was a variety of work. Agriculture, education, some assignments to ministries, a variety of things like that.

Q: How much contact, if any, did you have with the U.S. embassy in Tehran? Or embassy officials?

Metrinko: In my first year, when I was in Songhor, no contact at all. I used to go into Tehran about once every two or three months. I would go to the Peace Corps office.

In my second two years, because I was living part-time in Tehran, with embassy officials per se no contact whatsoever, but we were allowed to use the embassy restaurant, and I would go there perhaps once a month for a cheeseburger or a hamburger and a milkshake, because they would use beef, whereas the hamburgers in Tehran were basically at that point lamb. One had to escape

lamb once in a while.

But with embassy officials, nothing. I think I met one or two at a Thanksgiving party once and that was about it. I got a Christmas card from the ambassador once, but contact per se, nothing.

Q: What kind of views about U.S. policy towards Iran did you pick up while you were in the Peace Corps? Did you form any views of American or U.S. policy generally towards the country?

Metrinko: Not really. The political emphasis at that time was all in Vietnam. When volunteers got together, we rarely discussed the embassy. I mean, it wasn't a factor for us. We had contact with the Peace Corps staff, of course, quite a bit, visits and other things. But the embassy, the American presence there, was-- basically I didn't know very much about it. I didn't realize at the time that there were American team houses, for example, military missions scattered all around the country.

Q: The MAAG?

Metrinko: Yes, the MAAG missions. I had no contact with them. As for the embassy, I would only go into the restaurant. If I had any opinion I guess it was one of disdain for the embassy people. If you went into the embassy restaurant, you would see all the wives with varnished hair, and they all just looked sort

of silly and alien. They had no effect on my life.

And American policy towards Iran? I was always accused of being-- not always, but once in a while somebody would tell me that I worked for the CIA, and I would deny it.

Q: In the Peace Corps period?

Metrinko: In the Peace Corps period. Somewhat to my embarrassment now, I didn't really have a good idea at all of the American role in Iran at the time. Books about it were not available in Iran. At least not to me. And I was living such a totally Persian life that it just didn't come up.

Q: Now you mentioned some of the political problems students were having from your own perspective and first-hand view. What kind of view did you yourself form about the Shah and his regime? Did you share the same criticisms the students did?

Metrinko: I think yes, one of dislike. Dislike of SAVAK, because I could see what was happening. But on the other hand an appreciation for some of the things that were happening too. Without a strong central government the college I was teaching in would never have been established. It was a good school. I could see the effects of the Literacy Corps. I knew something about the way land had been broken up. The big estates passed out to villagers, I liked that. I could see other things that

the government was doing that I appreciated.

Q: Did land reform have a more positive impact in the Mamezan area than it did in Songhor?

Metrinko: It's hard to tell. The problem with land reform was that when the estates were broken up, the villagers who got parcels of land weren't really prepared to market what they produced. You know, it's fine to tell someone that these hectares are now his, but it became a little bit difficult to-- I mean, they didn't have access in many cases to machinery. The level of agriculture, at least in the Songhor area, was very primitive. I helped a villager once plow a field, using an ox and a wooden plow. This was the level of agriculture in the area. It was still, you know, using oxen and wooden plows, wooden yokes on the oxen. It was not an area that was being taken care of or being heavily invested in. It had always been remote. It was still a remote part of the country. Agriculture was the mainstay, but it was a very primitive mainstay. When oil money started to come into Iran and the massive construction projects began all around the country, a lot of village men simply left the villages. They would leave their wives and kids in the villages and they would go off to Tehran to work, to Abadan to the oil fields, that area, to work in construction. And they'd come back to their villages for one or two months a year on vacation, perhaps to help with the spring plowing or the

harvest. But basically they were moving out. I tracked a couple of village families like that, watching what was happening to them. That was the basic scenario.

Q: This was already happening when you were in Mamezan, this development?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: This oil boom was really taking off?

Metrinko: Just starting then, yes. But when I went back in '77 I could see the effects of it. Because I went back and revisited some of those remote villages near Songhor and there had been changes.

Q: When did you leave Iran? '73, was it? What month did you leave?

Metrinko: What month? Roughly August/September. I spent a couple of weeks traveling around Iran. Went back to the Kurdish area and then hitchhiked to Turkey. Spent about three weeks in Turkey. Got back to the States in, I believe, September, late September.

Q: You left the Peace Corps at this point?

Metrinko: Yes.

Q: You've sort of dealt with this in some respects. When you left the country in '73, what was your perspective on the value of the Peace Corps's work in Iran?

Metrinko: Very high. Very high. Well, there are two aspects to that. I could see with my own eyes students whom I knew, whom I had helped out in high school, who were already entering the university. I kept meeting teachers or, you know, my students at the college, who had had Peace Corps volunteers as their English teachers in years past. So I could see that sort of effect going on.

The real transformation, the real effect of the Peace Corps was not on the country of Iran, it was on the Peace Corps volunteers, who basically-- no one is familiar with Iran before you get there. You can't be. But there were a large number of volunteers who spent two or three very productive, very good years at an early time in their lives in Iran, and I could see the effect it was having on them as people. I think that's the main reason the Peace Corps was set up. I still believe in that very much. I'm not sure how much it really helped the countries we were assigned to, but I've seen its having had a tremendous effect on the volunteers themselves. It builds an openness in them to receive the concepts of foreign languages, foreign cultures, friendships, relationships. Things that if you go to a

country only with an embassy, you can never have.

Q: What was your next step after you left the Peace Corps?

Metrinko: I had taken the examination, written examination, for the State Department in 1972, December. Don't forget that I had a degree from the Foreign Service School at Georgetown. So it was sort of a natural next step. I had also applied at the same time to a couple of universities in the United States, wanting to come back and do a master's program or a doctoral program in Middle Eastern studies. At this point I had good Turkish, good Persian, and I was interested in continuing with that.

But I took the examination in December of '72, learned about two months later that I had passed that, and said that I wanted to take the oral exam when I got back to the United States in late '73, which was fine. I passed the oral exam and was told immediately, at that point in '73, they would tell you that very day if you had passed or not. I was told that same day that I had passed the oral exam. I took it in October of '73. Then I was told that it was just a matter of getting a security clearance, which would take a couple of months, and being called up for an available class, and the estimate was given at five or six months. Which was fine. I wanted to go overseas and I wanted to live well overseas. I had lived there five years-- I basically enjoyed being overseas. From the very first day when I got off the plane in Ankara, Turkey, I loved it. I felt very

much at home and constantly stimulated by it. I just wanted to continue that, but not at fifty dollars a month. Not having to hand-wash clothes in a tub and things like that.

Q: Your first assignment in the Foreign Service was in Ankara, Turkey?

Metrinko: Yes. The letter from the Foreign Service, asking me to come to class or to join one of the classes, came the same week as the acceptances to all the graduate schools. Of the graduate schools, one was prepared to offer me a fellowship, but I then sat down and did some thinking about finances and decided basically that going into the Foreign Service immediately, I would be getting paid to do what I would have to pay for if I went to graduate school. I'd also realized that because I'd had five years of work experience, I'd be entering the Foreign Service at as high a step as someone with a doctoral degree.

Q: What was that, a GS-12?

Metrinko: I'm not sure. It wasn't a GS rating. It was an FSO-7. Eight was the lowest. I was coming in as a seven. But it was the same that someone with a doctoral degree in Middle Eastern affairs would have been coming in as. And I decided that I'd rather get back to the Middle East or somewhere and get paid for what I was doing, instead of paying for it.

You have to remember that at this point I was already-- let's see, twenty-six-- twenty-seven years old, and when I thought about going off to graduate school, spending another three years would have taken me to age thirty, never having worked at a real salary, it was getting a little bit late.

I also knew that in the State Department I could probably leave for a year or two later and get another degree, which I did eventually, and have someone else take care of the finances for it.

Q: You said you went to Turkey first in the Foreign Service?

Metrinko: I had two months-- well, one month of orientation here in Washington, another month of consular training, and I was sent off to Turkey in the summer of 1974. Spent two years in Turkey, till '76. In '76 I volunteered to go to Beirut. At that point the embassy was being staffed only by volunteers. Before I could get there, while my household effects were en route to storage and my air freight was enroute to Beirut, the consular section to which I'd been assigned was closed down in Beirut. My assignment was canceled to Beirut. Instead I was sent to Damascus on a temporary assignment for six months, to fill in in the consular section, with a follow-up assignment starting in March of '77 to Tehran.

Q: Now what kind of work did you do in Turkey?

Metrinko: In Turkey I was assigned originally to be the vice-consul in the consular section, with work also in the political section as the junior political officer. When I got there, I discovered this was on paper alone, that what they really wanted was somebody to be the junior political officer full-time, with, if he had to, going part-time into the consular section. That had not been explained to me, perhaps on purpose, I'm not sure why, in Washington. But at any rate, just a few weeks after I got there, the ambassador's staff aide had to leave very suddenly for a family emergency. I was called up to be staff aide to the ambassador for two weeks until he got back. At the end of the two weeks the ambassador decided that he was going to rotate his former staff aide into a political job. He gave him my old job in the political section and I was staff aide for the next year to the ambassador.

Q: Who was that?

Metrinko: William B. Macomber. Political appointee with a long service in the Foreign Service. He'd been a political appointee for sixteen, seventeen years at that point.

Q: He'd been in AID before, hadn't he?

Metrinko: I believe so, yes.

Q: I think he directed AID for a while?

Metrinko: Yes, I believe he did. He was also assistant secretary for congressional relations, and administration here. He had also been ambassador to Jordan. A very good ambassador.

Q: So you worked as his assistant?

Metrinko: I was a staff aide for a year. At the end of a year there was another rotation. I went down to the GSO Section, General Services, and was in charge of the office that handled customs and transportation. Customs in the sense of incoming-outgoing pouches. Also the big shipments. Also the motor pool and all the drivers at the embassy. Very good job too. I had almost forgotten my Turkish in the staff aide job, because I never had time to use it. I was dealing only with Americans and with Turks who spoke excellent English, and I had no time for any other life. It was a job where I'd get into the office at seven-thirty and I would leave at seven-thirty or eight o'clock at night, with no weekends.

Q: Were you in Turkey already when they sent troops to Cyprus?

Metrinko: That was happening at that point. The war was going on when I arrived in Turkey.

Q: Did that take a lot of your time? The U.S. military bases were terminated at that point, I think, or later on?

Metrinko: No. No, not in Turkey. They're still there.

Q: The U.S. cut off aid though temporarily?

Metrinko: We cut off shipments of arms to Turkey, military supplies. I was there for that whole period, yes.

Q: Did you do all the work around the Cyprus issue? Did that take up all your time?

Metrinko: The job of a staff aide at that point was basically that of an advanced secretary. You know, carrying out the ambassador's instructions, making sure he got his reading, going through his reading, appointments, planning trips for him, things of that sort. It was not really all that substantive. And it was also filling in in the consular section, whenever the consul went on leave. By the second year I was doing a little bit more consular work, but basically the general services work. And working totally with Turks, many of whom spoke no English. Or preferred not to speak English, so we spoke Turkish. And that's when my Turkish improved quite a bit.

END OF SESSION #1