Parsons: No.

Q: How'd they know?

Parsons: But of course, I suppose, somehow you see -- I told you there's a rule of life that somehow the person in charge has just got to get it right.

Q: That's right.

Parsons: You know. That kind of thing was going wrong. I remember when my daughter Emma first went down to the Shiraz Festival in [nineteen] seventy-four. Actually long before that business of taking off their pants and raping each other and so on. But she was horrified at some of the things done there, at some of the Islamic religious ceremonies being turned into kind of theater. And then there was another thing. There were Brazilian dancers with somebody biting the heads off live chickens and so on. You know, that was rather shocking to the audience and Emma too. You know, all that kind of stuff.

Q: You know, one tried to change that. I remember writing an article about it and then telling an English magazine. And talking to people because, of course, I knew the people who were running the show and saying, "You know, why don't you invite so and so, and so and so from Britain, for instance?" And they said, "Well, we are not that kind of a festival. It has to be avant-garde."

Parsons: Yes.

Q: And I used to say, "Why does it have to be avant-garde? It hasn't been proven. Why not take something that is proven?"

Parsons: Of course, you see, this was I think one of the problems really. With all this money and the desire for progress of the Shah and the Empress, the place became kind of vulnerable to all experimenters who wanted to, as it were, develop their own creative instincts and hadn't been able to do so in their own country.

Q: Who?

Parsons: I remember there was a great thing a British firm actually had the consultancy for, cultural centers in the provinces. Well nobody quite knew what a cultural center was actually going to do. But the designs that this British firm was producing, on demand, too, were really like having the British National Theater here in small provincial towns of about ten thousand inhabitants. It was absurd really and so much money was being thrown away producing white elephants which, you know, would never be used. Want a cultural center in a small town? You really wanted half a dozen decent sized rooms, you know, where people could do whatever they wanted to do. Not some vast thing with lifts and neon lights on it and, you know, modernistic designs and so on particularly out of character. Terrible amount of waste in that way. But, of course,

there's a line in -- which reminds me of -- It describes something else in the poem. It alway's reminds me really, particularly of the Shahbanous' efforts. The line, couple of lines of poetry of Philip Larkin's [famous English poet] where he describes something as "a joyous shot at how things ought to be, long, fallen wide."

Q: Yes.

Parsons: [chuckle] And that's how it just seems. You know, somehow to me. Because they did have a vision. They had the shot at how they thought things ought to be and it fell wide.

Q: And she was the first person for it, funny enough. Because unlike her predecessors, she actually was modest and virtuous and --

Parsons: Yes.

Q: Blameless.

Parsons: Yes. Absolutely.

Q: And, you know, better than anyone else, really. So it really changed --

Parsons: And she had a great kind of empathy, I think, with the people. I mean, whatever they may say about her now, during the

revolution and all that kind of thing -- and I've seen her in action with ordinary people and she was very good.

Q: What about Hoveyda? He was your friend.

Parsons: He was a great friend. I was very, very fond of him indeed. Again, you --

Q: What did you think of him? Did you think -- I mean, what people said was that he was really a yes man. That he was a very intelligent man. He knew exactly what was happening and for the sake of keeping his own power he didn't dare to say anything to the Shah. He didn't do anything. He didn't try anything because he thought if he said anything that didn't please the Shah, he would be chucked out.

Parsons: Yes. I didn't quite see it like that. I was very fond of him so I am very prejudiced, I suppose. But what he always used to say to me was that, you know, there are terrible faults, that this man the Shah is the best Shah we've got and it's up to me to try and make it all work as best I can. I've just got to put up with it and try and make it work. And I always felt that was genuine. I don't think he was a man who really wanted to cling to power, because he had an awful number of interests of his own, you know. He loved literature and that kind of thing. He had a large number of intellectual interests. He wasn't a man who was just empty unless he had power. I think he was a genuine patriot. I think he was

much too tolerant. You know, he knew perfectly well that this chap or that chap was on the take or whatever it might be. But he, you know, would never mind --

Q: Funny thing was that as far as one would gather, he was completely pure, financially.

Parsons: Certainly. I would think this. I'm sure of that. Yes.

Q: Totally. And yet he closed his eyes on other people's corruptions.

Parsons: Yes. Yes.

Q: As indeed the Shah did to a large extent.

Parsons: Well, I think he --

Q: I wonder why?

Parsons: I think he was much too easygoing in that sense. Much too easy.

[end of side one of tape four]

Parsons: -- Get rid of all these kind of middlemen and that kind of thing in the overseas contracts and cut all of them out. He did

really seriously try and do that and did achieve something in that direction. But he was too easygoing about that kind of thing. There's no doubt about it.

Q: And when he was arrested and incarcerated, what did you do? How did you feel about it? Did you try to do something?

Parsons: I felt absolutely awful. I rang him up, before he was arrested, and tried to persuade him to run for it because I was sure he was going to be arrested. He refused to. I felt absolutely awful. I knew he'd never come out alive and whoever won the revolution that he would never reemerge. I wrote him a very long letter just before I left, which was smuggled to him in the prison, and I did get a message back that he had read it. And I never saw him again.

Q: What did you say in the letter?

Parsons: Well, I really went over our past together and said, you know, how much I'd enjoyed it and how much I liked him and how long it had all been and, you know, how terribly sad I was that it had all turned out like this and wished him the best of luck. I wrote what was in my heart. I felt very emotional about it.

Q: Did you try to help in any way? Did you try to plead with anyone?

Parsons: When I got back, myself and two or three friends of ours, of his, mutual friends (a chap who was a great friend of mine and of his who's now retired from our service), we did get together and mobilize a telegram from all living British Prime Ministers, asking for a fair trial and clemency and all the rest of it. I don't know whether it made things better or worse. It was inevitable. [sigh]

Q: Did he ever talk to you about his interests in the Sufi tradition because he used to come and see my father, I remember. He was very interested --

Parsons: Yes. We used to talk about that quite a lot. Here again, we had in a sense a kind of intellectual interest in Islam in common and of course he knew Arabic from his time in Beirut. We used to talk about that kind of thing quite a lot. I mean, we used to, in fact, talk much more about that kind of thing than we talked about business, I suppose. That's one of the things I enjoyed about him. He was an intellectual in the true sense. He had great intellectual interests. He read everything that had ever been written. He was always far ahead of me in reading all the new books of any interest. When he was Minister of Court I used to go up really not to talk business to him as Minister. We'd just sit around in the sitting room chatting for hours and hours and hours. I mean, not to do with his work or anything like that. No, you see, I still feel very badly about all that.

Q: Yes. So what about other personalities like -- What about Hooshang Ansari [Finance Minister] Was he a friend of yours?

Parsons: No. I can't say we were friends. I knew him very well. We did a lot of business together. I saw him very frequently because he was Minister of Finance most of the time I was there.

Q: Your first reaction was, "I don't want to talk about him."

Parsons: [laugh] No. I can't say that I was all that close to him. I admired him. I mean, he was a very, very formidable, very clever little man. He knew his job backwards. I always thought he was intensely ambitious. Well there's nothing much wrong with that, I suppose. Of course, he had a curious denouement, because, when the oil strike was on in [nineteen] seventy-eight, he was actually down in the oil fields negotiating with the workers. Had a very rough ride. Actually got roughed up by the workers down there. And he was kind of reporting back and we were all picking up what he was reporting in one way and another. He was negotiating away and then suddenly we heard that he was in Paris. He'd gone. Vanished. And never came back. This was about October, I should think it was.

Q: Long before everybody else left.

Parsons: Oh, yes. But whether it was because he was ill or what I just simply don't know. One day we heard he was down in the Ahvaz

and the next day we heard he'd gone and he never came back. I've never seen him since.

Q: What about Amouzegar? What did you think of him?

Parsons: I thought Amouzegar actually in pure intellectual terms was the cleverest man I've ever met in my life. I really did. I also liked him very much as a person. I found him enormously interesting and entertaining to talk with. But I was very, very struck by his sheer intellectual power. I thought he was a most formidable person. He had an impossible brief, I think. First of all running that Rastakhiz which, you know, was a fiasco. And then becoming Prime Minister in a country where expectations had been aroused to fever pitch and being told that everything must be cut back and there was to be austerity and all the rest of it. Of course, if he'd had greater political sense, he would probably have said to the Shah, "Look, if we're going to do this at all, we've got to do it very slowly and very gradually and lower the expectations without people realizing that we're doing so." But as a kind of super technician, he immediately started cutting everything in sight and, of course, I suppose this helped to precipitate the results. But, given that, maybe his judgment in the pure political sense wasn't all that hot; but he was a very, very impressive man. I would like to meet him again.

Q: Did you ever meet any of the people, let's say somebody like Doctor Fallah? [Reza Fallah -- one of the chiefs of NIOC]

Parsons: Yes.

Q: Who had apparently amassed awesome fortunes? I don't know how. But, I mean, anyway they did. And who a lot of people say was to a certain extent responsible for the downfall of the Shah because of their excesses and the fact that they --

Parsons: Funny you see really because the strange thing I found was (I mean I knew him well) certainly to all intents and purposes, I mean in terms of his style of life in Tehran, his general appearance, his manner, you would never have said here is a man who's amassed enormous fortunes and so on. I mean there was nothing of vulgarian about him. And who was that chap (I forget his name now) who ran the Coca Cola business, who had built a kind of Petit Trianon somewhere? I mean that was real vulgarity. You know, real nouveau riche stuff. But the people like Reza Fallah and the people whom everybody gossiped about well, maybe they may own half England or (well he's dead now, poor man) -- But there wasn't really -- I mean, these people were rich and they lived very well. But there wasn't enormous ostentation really in Tehran anyway. There may have been, of course, when they were in Switzerland or Nice or wherever they went to spend all that money, although there was a great distinction between rich and poor and so on. But the houses that I used to go and have dinner at, there were some appalling nouveau riche people, like there are in all rapidly growing societies, who were frightfully vulgar and flashing money about all over the place.

But the people like him, No. His house was quite modest. His dinner parties were very nice. You would never have said, you know, "Here's the man who has helped himself to the Crown Jewels!"

Q: You know there were also -- I don't know whether you've ever come across the traditional Iran. I mean the old guard when I was a child. I mean, unfortunally, I never lived there as an adult. But friends of my father's or people who used to come and visit me. They were really great statesmen. The kind of statesman as you were mentioning earlier who did have a constituency. In other words they did have the common touch. They did care about the traditions. They had a lot more judgment in other words. People like the Entezam brothers.

Parsons: Yes. I know. Well, of course, I did meet some of them. But, you see, this was really the -- I mean, by the time I got to Iran in early [nineteen] seventy-four, that whole generation and that class of person had really been put onto the shelf completely. This was one of the things, of course, going right back to the beginning of our conversation today that surprised me. That there really didn't seem to be anybody around except the Shah, the Court and the Technocrats. I mean, all these people like old Ardalan and Entezam and people like that, they were names. And some of them I met occasionally but they were pushed right out of everything. On the shelf. This was the new Iran and these new young men were the people who were running it with the Shah and that was it.

Q: They never listened to them?

Parsons: No. I don't think the Shah ever used to see them even.

Q: That was a tragedy.

Parsons: Yes. I think it was. I think it was.

Q: But they had such knowledge and such wisdom.

Parsons: And then of course, he started digging them out in the last months, you see, all these eighty and ninety year old gentlemen. It was ridiculous really.

Q: What about Eqbal ? He was a bit of an old guard --

Parsons: Yes. He was a bit of an old guard man. I was also rather impressed by him. I think he felt the trouble coming. I remember having a long talk to him about a couple of weeks before he suddenly died. And he was saying how desperately worried he was about the situation and how things were really frightfully bad. And he took me aside, I remember, in his garden and lectured for ages on this. I was surprised, actually, although things weren't going so well. He was speaking in much more apocalyptic terms than he ever had to me before.

Q: What was he saying?

Parsons: Well, saying that, you know, how absolutely frightful it all was. And how much discontent there was. And how chaotic the whole situation had got. And how the government had totally lost the initiative, had lost control, how the Shah was totally out of touch. And really terrible things. I remember him saying terrible things are going to happen. I was very interested in this. In fact, I think I even reported it to London. And then --

Q: And then he suddenly died.

Parsons: A week or two later, he was dead.

Q: And what about the Mullahs? Did you never meet any of them?

Parsons: No.

Q: You were terrified of them. Of the implications.

Parsons: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely. Never went near one.

Q: Never?

Parsons: Never. Absolutely not.

Q: I wonder what happened that somebody like Khomeini came to the fore because he was not an important in Mullah.

Parsons: Well, I suppose he got where he was because the whole thing turned against the Shah personally. The whole country did. And, of course, he was the symbol of absolutely implacable, relentless resistance to him. He'd never compromise. And this, I suppose is what brought him right to the top.

End of Interview

PARSONS, SIR ANTHONY