

## Ali Goes Home Early

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Tuesday, December 06, 2011

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Picture Tehran, Iran in the early 1970s. The Shah was still in power. The students had not yet taken 52 American citizens hostage at their own Embassy. While there was tension between Iranians and foreigners, it had not yet gotten to the point where it was unsafe for them to be there.

My father worked for an aerospace company who had sold helicopters to the Shah's Air Force. He was assigned to set up a repair and maintenance program for those helicopters with the Iranian Air Force. Since it was to be a long assignment, my mother and the 3 boys still at home went with my father to Iran. In fact my middle brother, Mike, graduated high school there. The graduation ceremony for his class was held at the American Embassy that was later to become the site of the prolonged diplomatic crisis. Richard Helms, the former CIA Director, was Ambassador to Iran at that point and gave a speech to Mike's graduating class.

As my brother Mike puts it living overseas was always a bit upside-down. In America our family was middle class. Go overseas with a good American salary, per diem and other perks for taking on such duties in countries such as Iran you are vaulted into a different social stratum. While my parents and brothers were in Iran they lived in North Tehran, the "rich" part of town. The houses in this section of town were behind walls and gates.

As "wealthy" Americans you are expected to help the local economy by hiring a servant or two. My parents did so. There were various maids over their two years in Iran. They also had a man, Ali that came in once a week. He would do windows, floors, heavy cleaning that the maid did not do. Also the Iranian Air Force had assigned a driver to my father. For various reasons it was not a good idea for an American to drive in Iran if it could be avoided at all.

On those days that Ali worked he was expected to be there a set number of hours. As he entered the house my mother would greet him, "*Salaam aleikum, Ali. Ali Shuman kube?*" This translates into English as "God be with you, Ali. Are you OK?"

On this particular day he did his chores and left after bidding my mother farewell. My mother suddenly become concerned as my youngest brother Mark was usually coming home as Ali was leaving. Part of

her concerns stemmed from the rising tensions of that era. On the roofs around the school my brother attended were armed guards. A precautionary measure, I am sure. Thinking perhaps she had missed hearing the bus, she went across the street to a Swedish neighbor who also had children. The neighbor looked at her funny and said it was not yet time for the kids to be home. Looking at the clocks in her neighbor's house, it suddenly dawned on her that Ali had left early. When she returned home she realized that the clocks downstairs had been set one hour ahead.

If you do not know my mother, her well suited nickname is Sarge. With 5 boys and a husband who travelled extensively she needed to be in charge. I am sure there are many drill instructors that could learn a trick or two from my mother.

The next time Ali came to work my mother greeted him, "*Salaam aleikum, Ali. Ali Shuman kube?*" She acted as if nothing unusual had happened the last time he had been there. Ali began his chores. As he worked my mother covertly moved all the clocks in the house backwards 15 minutes at a time. Eventually the clocks showed that it was time for Ali to quit for the day. My mother had managed to add two hours onto Ali's work day.

The next time that Ali was scheduled to work, my mother wondered if he would even bother to show up. He did come at the appointed time. My mother greeted him, "*Salaam aleikum, Ali. Ali Shuman kube?*" Ali responded with a big smile on his face, but said nothing about the previous time.

From then on, my mother's clocks kept perfect time.

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