

Meeting Mr. Paul Levering Again After 51 Years!

By Ezzat Goushegir



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In 1964, Paul Levering, a Peace Corps volunteer, traveled to Iran to teach English to high school students and work as an athletic instructor. The chosen city was Dezful, my city of birth, known for its ancient history and old bridge.

I was 12 when my brother invited Mr. Paul, as he was introduced, to our house around the end of October, where I then met the first American person in my life. It was late afternoon and the weather was still warm. My



Paul Levering with a class of adults.

older sister greeted him in our guest room, where most of our Persian carpets were piled up on top of a big table in the corner of the room and the black and white woolen sofa made the air much warmer.

Mr. Paul looked at the carpets with a sense of curiosity and asked my sister if they were real Persian rugs. She answered yes. He was calm and puzzled for a moment. Tall and blonde with sparkling blue eyes and a very special tender smile, he had his suit on. We sensed he must feel warm.



Paul Levering teaching English as a second language (TEFL).

My brothers arranged summer chairs on the center of the yard, under the palm tree, a 100-year old Konar tree and the citrus trees, which we had showered earlier with sprinkles of water to cool down the air. In the kitchen, all of us, my brothers and sisters, competed with each other to make our best lemonade with fresh limes, sugar and cube ice. My mother poured it in the most elegant glass, washed summer fruits, arranged them in a tray and we brought them excitedly to the yard as served with Dezfuli hospitality.

We circled around Mr. Paul and listened to his pronunciation of our names, which created a cheerful environment. It was enormously charming to listen to his pronunciation of my sister's name Fakhri, since he naturally could not pronounce "kh."

We sometimes saw Mr. Paul on his bicycle riding on the streets. Little boys ran after his bike, singing songs teasingly and making playful gestures. I felt so much for him and wondered, "What has motivated an American young man to leave his comfortable life in America, coming to this hot, dusty city.... alone?" I thought about his diet, food differences, bathing, bed, the weather and his bike on the grubby, uneven streets, filled with bare feet children, stray dogs, cats, local black buffaloes, chickens and roosters.



Paul Levering was a modern "Pied Piper."

Then I didn't see him and didn't think about him, although we talked about him here and there, and I dreamed of him as a foreign man from a foreign land. I fictionalized him as a planted palm tree in our house wearing a spotless suit and tie when the wind would dishevel his golden blonde locks, and birds would throw sweet fruits down.

Until one early morning in 2006. I was sitting on the L train in Chicago going to work where I saw two young men sitting across from me talking about their dream of going to war in the Middle East for the fun of killing. I froze on the spot. "Is this really true what I am hearing?" I thought.

After 42 years I was filled with the memory of Mr. Paul, a man with a kind smile, calm face and humble gestures. A man whom we the people of Dezful loved and respected dearly. The statement of those young men startled me. How could killing be fun?

I thought about writing a novella about the first encounter between two people from different nationalities and how they would perceive each other through certain historical situations. I wanted to find Mr. Paul, see him and talk to him after over 50 years and compare his perspective with the two young men I saw on the train. I wanted to search for answers to many challenging, complex questions and create a world --- like many of Marguerite Duras' novellas-- based on understanding and tenderness, even though my project may have been considered idealistic!

I started my research on him, collecting information, memories from my family, friends, looking for any trace or evidence of him on internet. My sister Azam in Boise continued the research. Then one day Azam called me and said, "Yesterday after nearly eight years of research I was able to speak with Mr. Paul!"

It turned out that her friend Marcia, who knew about our search, had met another former Iran Peace Corps volunteer at a conference who was finally able to track down Mr. Paul.

This was a new beginning....a new discovery....a new direction to create something crucially essential.

In the summer of 2015, Azam, Marcia and I were waiting for well-traveled Mr. Paul at the Boise airport. Then he finally came through the doors. He was still as tall, quiet and thoughtful as our palm trees. And he still had those same blue eyes and tender smile. I knew we could have hours of discussions about literature, arts, politics, anthropology, psychology, cultures, and various aspects of human life.



Paul Levering standing on a roof with the tomb of Daniel in the background.



Ezzat Goushegir greets Paul Levering at the Boise Airport

We indeed had endless talks...days after days...about everything. He could not remember any of us, nor our palm trees, Konar trees, lemonade and fresh summer fruits. But something deep, substantial and profound began to develop in all of us, in him, in our family and friends, during those days in my sister's house. Something essential but invisible, something beyond everyday life.

- [Ezzat Goushegir](#) is a playwright and teacher in Chicago.



Left: Ezzat Goushegir, Paul Levering and Azam Houle.



Right: Azam Houle, Paul Levering and Marcia Franklin in the Boise airport.