

# **Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America Study Guide**

**Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America by Firoozeh Dumas**

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# Plot Summary

"Funny in Farsi - A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America," tells the story of Firoozeh, her parents Kazem and Nazireh, her brothers and an extended family most of whom eventually transplanted from their homeland of Iran to America. At just seven years of age, Firoozeh and her family moved from Abadan, Iran, to Whittier, California, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. Kazem, who was an engineer with the National Iranian Oil Company, had lived in American when he won a Fulbright grant to attend graduate school first in Texas and then later in California. He had nothing but positive memories about his time as a student and was confident of his English.

Nazireh and Firoozeh were relieved that Kazem knew English because they only spoke Persian. But they soon learned from shopping and dining out that no one in American could begin to understand a thing Kazem was saying when he spoke English. Firoozeh caught on to English quickly at school. She soon became her mother's interpreter during shopping excursions. Nazireh learned her English from quiz shows. When she spoke English, it was without verbs and with a generous use of the word "it." She called everything from her husband to her kitchen table "it."

Firoozeh takes the reader through the journey of her family in an unknown land and strange new culture. Kazem loved Disneyland in an almost worshipful way. Walt Disney was a genius. The patient park visitors waiting in long lines impressed him—in Iran such a wait would result in physical combat. Although the family didn't find American food very tasty, they marveled at the smiling waitresses, the clean bathrooms and the clear signage on the way to the restaurants—things that were not common in Iran.

Although the family adored America and felt fortunate to be there, they never stopped loving their homeland and all the friends and family there. Firoozeh and her family were treated with kindness by everyone they met in American. Most Americans had not heard of Iran at the time she first entered the country. Americans were impressed with her intelligence, surprised that such a tiny girl could speak Persian! They had many questions for her but their curiosity was always accompanied by good manners and kindness.

Firoozeh's family settled into American life never abandoning their allegiance to Iran. In general, things went well but there were times when Firoozeh felt isolated and left out. Firoozeh describes her time at summer camp when she did not make one friend and wouldn't take a shower because of her culture's attention to modesty. Christmas time was a difficult time for non-Christian immigrants to be in the US because the holiday was such a huge presence during all of December. Her family's favorite Christmas past time was watching the Bob Hope specials.

After the Iranian Revolution began, Americans became less friendly and more suspicious of resident Iranians—particularly during the Iranian hostage crisis. Kazem lost his job with the Iranian oil company since the country had ceased building new refineries. He had problems attaining a new position because of bias against his



ethnicity. After the hostages were released, an American company hired him; however, at a much lower salary than he had in the past. But it didn't bother him. He knew it wasn't money that made a man rich.

Firoozeh met a Frenchman, Francois Dumas, while they were both students at Berkeley. The couple eventually married. Francois' family was against their union but they were undeterred. They were married in both a Catholic mass and a traditional Persian ceremony. Firoozeh's chronicle of her and her family's life in and adjustment to America is light-hearted and fun. Even in the face of prejudice and unfortunate times, the family drew on the support of one another and made it through. They loved America and appreciated the opportunities they were given but they never lost sight of their homeland. Iran would forever be in their hearts.



# Chapters 1 through 3

## Chapters 1 through 3 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 1: Leffingwell Elementary School

When Firoozeh Dumas was seven years old, she moved from Abadan, Iran, to Whittier, California with her parents and fourteen-year-old brother, Farshid. Firoozeh's father, Kazem, had fallen in love with the kindness, freedom, and potential that America offered years before when he attended graduate school in Texas and California, where he earned advanced degrees in engineering. The move to California was to be temporary as Kazem, an engineer with the National Iranian Oil Company, was taking on a two year project as a consultant for an American firm.

Firoozeh met with her teacher, Mrs. Sandberg, prior to beginning second grade at Leffingwell Elementary School. Accompanied by her father who spoke English and her mother who did not, Firoozeh displayed the only English she knew by reciting her colors. On the first few days of school, Firoozeh's mother, Nazireh, sat in with her in class. The other children were curious about the new girl and her mother. Mrs. Sandberg wrote Firoozeh's name on the board and spelled out Iran beneath it. She pulled a map down and looked at Nazireh expectantly. Mrs. Sandberg wanted her to point out where Iran was but unfortunately, she like most women in Iran were undereducated and could not comply with the request. Nazireh had wanted to be educated in midwifery. She had her father's support but when Kazem came courting her education was abandoned. Seventeen-year-old Nazireh married Kazem and had a baby by the year's end.

Firoozeh was embarrassed by her mother's inability to find her own country on the map. She was afraid the kids would think she was stupid. Although they lived only a few blocks from school, Firoozeh and Nazireh got lost on the way home. A kind neighbor helped them find their way home. Firoozeh, like her father before her, was impressed by how kind Americans were.

### Chapter 2: Hot Dogs and Wild Geese

Firoozeh and Nazireh depended on Kazem to lead them around their new surroundings and to interpret the English conversation and writing for them. Only when they began visiting stores and restaurants, did they realize that most Americans could barely understand Kazem's English. Later they realized he had mastered English as far as graduate school and engineering was concerned, but beyond that he was fairly lost. But Kazem, in denial, was not deterred and continue to confuse most Americans he tried to communicate with.

Nazireh learned her English by watching American quiz shows like "The Price Is Right" and "Let's Make a Deal." Since Farshid was busy with soccer and other sports, Nazireh



decided to use Firoozeh, who was learning English at school, as her interpreter at the market and for other errands. Everyone thought Firoozeh was a seven-year-old genius for being able to translate Persian into English and vice versa. It was comical when her mother began to acquire some English speaking ability. She spoke in paragraphs without verbs, called everything from her husband to the kitchen table "it," and, couldn't pronounce anything with "w" and "th" sounds.

After living in American thirty years, Nazireh and Kazem have done well with their English. But English is a difficult, inconsistent language with many confusing idioms like hot dogs and mud pies. Firoozeh's parents still don't understand why kids what to be "cool" in order to be "hot." When Kazem called a friend's daughter "homely," he meant she would be a good homemaker and when he referred to people who honked their horns repeatedly, he intended no double-meaning by calling them "horny."

### Chapter 3: In the Gutter

Kazem grew up poor in Ahwaz, Iran. His parents both died when he was young. As a result, Kazem and his siblings became very close and maintained that closeness when they moved to America. Being poor as a youth, engendered a desire in Kazem to become wealthy. He knew that being a salaried engineer would not make him rich but he held onto the hope that somehow, wealth would eventually fall into his lap. It was with this mindset that Kazem applied for and was accepted to appear on Bowling for Dollars. The show might be his pot of gold. However, when he finally got to appear on the show he knocked over only seven pins and won just seven dollars. After that poor showing, Kazem gave up bowling and the family gave up watching "Bowling for Dollars," in favor of "Sonny and Cher."



# Chapters 4 through 6

## Chapters 4 through 6 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 4: Save Me, Mickey

Since the initial plan was to live in America only two years, the family lost no time in seeing and doing everything California had to offer. They had fun at the many amusement parks, enjoyed the abundance of junk food, and were impressed by the clean bathrooms, smiling faces, and clear signage. These were little things but lacking in their homeland. In a league by itself, outpacing every wonderful thing about America and California, was Disneyland. The family had an almost religious devotion to it. To Kazem, Walt Disney was a genius who allowed everyone to revisit the wonderment of childhood. To Kazem, the pinnacle of mankind's achievement was "The Pirates of the Caribbean" ride at Disneyland.

One weekend, he arranged for six Iranian colleagues and their families to meet his family at Disneyland. Having been there some fifteen times, Firoozeh had grown tired of it. However, Kazem, self-appointed Magic Kingdom ambassador, was undeterred. He focused the groups' attention on the long lines of visitors waiting patiently, noting that in Iran the people would be fighting. Firoozeh got lost from the group and wound up in the kid's lost and found. A panicked Kazem eventually appeared, greatly relieved that she was safe. He bought her every toy and souvenir she wanted. When they went to the Hollywood Wax Museum several weeks later, Kazem was still feeling the sting of losing his daughter temporarily and bought her everything she wanted there.

### Chapter 5: Swoosh-Swoosh

Firoozeh's Uncle Nematollah decided to take a break from his medical practice in Iran and visit Kazem's family. Both Kazem and his younger brother, Nematollah, were fascinated with American food. Each day they would drive to the supermarket and bring home dozens of strange American products. In Iran, food preparation took half of each day. There were no fast-foods or easy prep foods in Iran. After weeks of trying every form of American food available, Kazem and Nematollah concluded that the only American foods that were edible were canned chili, Chips Ahoy cookies and ice cream. Next the men tried every fast-food place they could find—except Der Wienerschnitzel because the name was intimidating and too hard to pronounce. It was the consensus of the family that Kentucky Fried Chicken and Baskin-Robbins were tops in the fast-food department. American style pizza was another favorite of the family who couldn't seem to get enough of the wondrous food.

Uncle Nematollah, much to his dismay, couldn't button his pants after just two months on his American diet. He decided to lose weight.. He tried several diet remedies from the drug store. A diet shake was somewhat successful until Nematollah decided it tasted better with a couple of scoops of Baskin-Robbins ice cream. Next, he ordered a sure-



fire remedy advertised on TV. Until it arrived, he ate all of his favorite American foods including Twinkies, tacos and beef jerky. He finally had luck with the Body Shaper which consisted of a nylon rope and pulleys which were used for sit-ups and leg raises by attaching it to doorknobs. It was successful and Nematollah was able to lose his stomach. The family learned to listen for the "swoosh swoosh" the Body Shaper made when Nematollah was using it so they wouldn't hit him with a door.

#### Chapter 6: With a Little Help from My Friends

Firoozeh and her family moved to the US before the political upheaval in Iran. Americans were curious about Iran and its people. Most had never heard of it. After Firoozeh learned English well enough, kids and adults alike had many questions for her about her homeland. Most Americans confused Iran with Arabia thinking there was a connection taking between Iran and the Sahara Desert, camels and Lawrence of Arabia.

As frustrating as it was to be asked the same things repeatedly, the questions were asked with genuine curiosity and kindness. Neighbors were very kind, always inviting Firoozeh to birthday parties and sending American snacks to school for her. After two years, the family had mixed emotions about returning to Iran. Nazireh was very emotional saying good-bye to all the people who had been so kind to Firoozeh. The family would remember the kindnesses forever. Iranians who moved to America after the revolution had a far different opinion of Americans. They found them cold and unfriendly.





# Chapters 7 through 9

## Chapters 7 through 9 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 7: Bernice

In 1976, the family moved to Newport Beach for another of Kazem's consulting jobs. People in Newport mistook them for Mexicans and assumed that they were housekeepers and gardeners because they were the only Mexicans found in Newport Beach. At school, a nurse named Bernice, swore that Firoozeh was Alaskan. She was asked by her seventh grade teacher to give a report on her homeland, the teacher was disappointed when she hauled out her Persian artifacts. The teacher thought she was from Peru!

While they lived in Newport Beach, the Iranian government took a group of Americans hostage. Americans began to look at all Iranians with suspicious eyes. Eventually, Firoozeh moved to Berkeley where some very progressive students sided against the CIA for their treatment of Iranians. While in Berkeley, Firoozeh met her future husband, a Frenchman named Francois. Even though he was a foreigner just like she was, everyone assumed that because he was French, he was a well-read intellectual who could create impressionist paintings.

### Chapter 8: A Dozen Key Chains

Farshid was asked to find the perfect summer camp for his eleven-year-old sister who desperately wanted to spend time away from home. Farshid's research found that the perfect camp for Firoozeh was the Pine Lodge Mountain Summer Camp in the Mammoth Mountains. Kazem would not question his eighteen-year-old son's wisdom and was delighted with the choice. Her mother, as usual, had no opinion. Twenty years later, she revealed that she thought at the time that Firoozeh should not go. Kazem and Firoozeh went on a shopping trip to purchase all the things that she would be required to bring. Kazem, who bought nothing at full price, purchased a huge, discounted sleeping bag that came with no bag in which to carry it. At home, they had nothing large enough to carry it in. After fighting with the sleeping bag, trying to get it into various bags, Kazem had a brainstorm—a Hefty garbage bag would work just fine.

To her dismay, when Kazem took her to the bus pick-up location, every other kid had signed up with a friend. She was new in Newport Beach and knew no one. She was alone and had to try to ignore that every kid was staring at the huge trash bag she was toting. Coming from a modest family and culture, she was horrified to learn that she'd have to be naked in front of the others girls when taking a shower. She decided not to bathe. Of the eleven other girls, ten were mean and the eleventh one cried all the time from being homesick. Firoozeh was thankful for the crying girl and her brother who was also at camp because they were the number one targets of the other kids while she was their number three selection.



To avoid getting dirty, Firoozeh skipped the physical activities and only participated in arts and crafts. She made a load of macrame key chains during her stay. She was chosen to play a ghost in a play that the camp was putting on. She was dusted with talcum powder to appear ghostly. Afterward, she wanted to bathe but could not bring herself to do so. After two weeks, her torture was over and she returned home. Her father told her she smelled and asked if she bathed during the two weeks. She assured him she had and also told him how much fun camp was.

#### Chapter 9: You Can Call Me Al

With her brothers at college, Firoozeh was often forced to accompany her parents to Las Vegas for long weekends. To Kazem that was the best place on earth. It was fun and cheap. Her parents always prayed on the Koran for a safe trip to Las Vegas which Firoozeh thought was almost sacrilegious considering where they were heading. They'd always stop at Denny's along the way where Kazem would marvel at the friendly waitresses and clean bathrooms. America was great!

As soon as they checked in to their hotel, Kazem would go play black jack. When he lost, which was more often than not, he blamed his bad luck on a redheaded man sitting at the table or someone wearing a hat. The most ironic superstition was that foreigners were bad luck and caused him to lose. He seemed to forget his own official status. Firoozeh recalled the vacations that the family took in Iran to the Caspian Sea. The scenery surrounding the region was some of the most beautiful in the world.



# Chapters 10 through 12

## Chapters 10 through 12 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 10: Of Mosquitoes and Men

Francois told Firoozeh about his Greek grandfather dying in Baghdad from an infection. He had gone there to set up a bread factory. According to Muslim laws, he was buried immediately. Francois' grandmother, Octavie had him dug up and buried him in a Catholic ceremony. Living in the Congo for a while, Octavie had a pet baby buffalo but gave it to a zoo when it got too large to manage. On the train ride to the zoo, somebody must have gotten hungry. Word got back to Octavie that her pet had been slaughtered and made into a stew.

When Francois and Firoozeh decided to get married, Francois wanted to honeymoon in India. Firoozeh told him she had had enough of bad plumbing, unbearable heat, and massive amounts of mosquitoes in Iran and India was worse. She had grown used to California where there was a pleasant absence of mosquitoes, temperate weather, and air conditioning. Francois saw it her way. They honeymooned in Paris at a beautiful hotel with great plumbing and free from mosquitoes.

### Chapter 11: The "F" Word

In the land of Joe and Sue, American kids had a hard time with Firoozeh's names and those of her relatives. Her cousin Farbod was called "Farhead" by the other kids. The kids called Firoozeh "Ferocious." When the family moved to Newport Beach, she decided to add an American middle name to her name. Her brothers who ridiculed her for naming herself Julie, later became Fred and Sean. She felt like a fake and when she went to college and went back to using her given name.

After graduating from college, Firoozeh had trouble getting interviews. When she went back to using "Julie," she started getting job offers. When she married, she became Julie Dumas. Her relatives called her Firoozeh and her American friends called her Julie. When the two groups met it was too confusing and she returned to Firoozeh again. Once when she was called in for a doctor's appointment, the nurse called her "Fritzy Dumbass." One mom at her children's school refused to learn her name and just called her "F Word."

### Chapter 12: Waterloo

Kazem considered himself the Christopher Columbus of Iran since he was the first in the family to settle permanently in America where all his siblings eventually settled. Kazem also prided himself as the family swim instructor, insisting each summer that this cousin or that niece would learn how to swim. He bragged about his magic touch and his perfect track record until one summer when he met his Waterloo. He could not teach Firoozeh to swim. After several unsuccessful summers of swimming lessons, Kazem



was beside himself. If anyone mentioned anything that sounded like "swim, " he would glare at his daughter and shake his head. He made excuses that she was "built like a rock," or "she just sinks." He finally abandoned the family swimming lessons and announced that some people are incapable of swimming and that Firoozeh was one of those people.

The family visited Aunt Parvine, a noted doctor who lived in Switzerland. Aunt Parvine announced that she, a medical doctor, would be able to teach Firoozeh how to swim. She failed as well and confirmed that Firoozeh was built like a rock. Word got around the family and Kazem was vindicated for his failure. When Firoozeh was ten years old, she took it on herself to wade into the Caspian Sea during a vacation and began to swim. She explained to her father she was able to swim because no one was yelling at her.



# Chapters 13 through 15

## Chapters 13 through 15 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 13: America, Land of the Free

Firoozeh and her relatives all celebrated Thanksgiving together. In addition to turkey and dressing, they served traditional Persian dishes. Although they were proud to be Iranians, they expressed their gratitude to be in the land of the free. To Kazem "land of the free" had several meanings. He and Nematollah headed out to lunch one day. When they returned, Kazem said they ate at the Price Club. The Price Club is a warehouse of food but has no restaurants. Kazem explained that they had filled up on all the "free samples" at the Price Club.

Kazem and Nazireh always took advantage of Denny's free birthday dinner. Kazem listed his birthday as the same as his wife's since he didn't know exactly when he was born. The waitresses would "ooh" and "aah" over the cute little couple who had the same birth date. After Kazem retired, he took up a new hobby of going on timeshare seminars. Once was enough for Nazireh but Kazem couldn't get enough of the freebies they offered and took his brother Nematollah, with him. They saw Palm Springs, San Diego and Santa Barbara all at the expense of timeshare companies. The pressure didn't bother them as the free lunches were worth it.

### Chapter 14: The Ham Amendment

During Firoozeh's childhood, Iran was ruled by a monarchy led by the Shah. Kazem was a loyal supporter of the Shah and was sure he would bring prosperity to Iran. One year, the Shah had a visit planned to Abadan for the opening of a petro plant. Oil was a natural gift and resource of Iran. But when something is that abundant, others are tempted to steal it. British Petroleum made a deal with the Shah that allowed BP to drill for oil for a relatively small amount in return. It was a bad deal for Iran but an excellent one for the greedy British. In the 1950s, Iran woke up and realized they were being taken and forced BP to leave. The British were not willing to walk away so easily. They, in league with other oil companies and countries, boycotted Iranian oil which crippled Iran's economy. Another deal was negotiated that allowed the oil companies back in but agreed to pay a fairer amount to the Iranian government.

When Kazem was in graduate school in America, he grew to love ham and jello. Nazireh learned to make jello for him. She refused to buy ham for him so he would buy it himself. Later, when Firoozeh began studying Islam, she learned that ham was a forbidden food and that her father was destined to go to hell. She pleaded with him not to eat any more ham. He explained that when the Prophet Muhammad forbade the eating of ham, people didn't know how to prepare it and it made them sick. If the Prophet were alive today, he told her, he would change that rule. Kazem told his



daughter that it didn't matter what you eat or don't eat or what religion you are. What counted was what is in your heart and how you treat people.

#### Chapter 15: Treasure Island

Kazem loved going to movies as a child. The family did not have much extra money, but when his father's crops were profitable, there was enough for him to buy his tickets. He loved the tearjerkers and the American westerns. His favorite movie was the 1934 *Treasure Island*. It inspired him to seek his own treasure. His treasure came in the form of a Fulbright Grant that would allow him to attend graduate school in the United States. Although his chances were slim, he submitted his application. His acceptance letter was lost in the mail. When he finally got the letter a month later, he found he was accepted to Texas A&M and was supposed to have been there the week before. Kazem raced to Tehran to get his passport updated and had to go through days of red tape but he was finally on a plane destined for Texas.

Kazem was lonely in Texas and felt a little estranged from the other students since he had missed most of the orientation. Another student who was suffering from loneliness was given the option of going to any other school of his choice. That gave Kazem an idea. He wrote a letter saying he was lonely, hoping he'd get to transfer to a livelier location. It backfired when their response was to take him on tours of the museums and other cultural centers in town. During Easter break, a professor invited him to come home for the week with him. They arrived by car in New Jersey three days later. The professor told him that another friend of his would be visiting. Remarkably, that guest was none other than Albert Einstein. The genius made the mistake of asking Kazem about the Fulbright Grant and Kazem gave him way more information than polite conversation would allow.

Meeting Albert Einstein confirmed to Kazem that the Fulbright Grant was his treasure and he dreamed of returning to America one day and raise his family there so that they too could get the grand education that had been afforded to him. That dream was fulfilled.



# Chapters 16 through 18

## Chapters 16 through 18 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 16: It's All Relatives

Family relationships are complicated in Iran. While there is one name for cousin in America, there are at least eight different names that describe the relationship of a cousin in Persian. Firoozeh's aunt Sedigeh was her ameh which meant her father's sister. She was particularly close to her ameh who had only sons and thought of Firoozeh as a daughter. Kazem is close to Sedigeh's children, considering them like his own. Kazem often talked about how unjust it was that his sister Sedigeh was not allowed to continue her education. To Kazem, she was the smartest one in the family. His feelings about his sister was one reason he told Firoozeh she would get a degree no matter if she used it or not. Education was of paramount importance in the family and almost every every child in Firoozeh's large family earned a college education.

### Chapter 17: Me and Bob Hope

Firoozeh and her family were secular Muslims. In the streets of Iran, before the revolution, only older women covered themselves head to toe. Younger women dressed in western style. Religion was a subject in schools but all religions were taught including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism. The children were taught to practice Islam but to respect all religions. Learning about Islam was mandatory but its practice was not.

When the family moved to America, Firoozeh was thrilled with school. There was a lot less homework, more parties, no requirements to memorize long poetry and no endless math drills. Everything was wonderful for Firoozeh until Christmastime. She was not invited to her friend's Christmas parties. The biggest holiday in Iran was Nowruz, New Year's Day. It was a secular holiday that everyone celebrated. The family celebrated Nowruz in America but since there were so few Iranians to share the fun with, it lost its sense of fun.

It was difficult being a minority during Christmas, which was American's biggest holiday. She and her Jewish friends would find solace in each other and couldn't wait until December 26th when there would be no more Christmas songs. Firoozeh and her family only enjoyed Christmas because of the TV specials, especially the Bob Hope Christmas special. Kazem didn't understand most of the jokes but laughed heartily any way. When Firoozeh married a Catholic she was immediately drawn into the celebration of Christmas. She and her kids decorated a tree and the kids eagerly awaited Christmas. She baked cookies and made fudge. After the exhausting month of December, she often looked back to the simple "Christmases" she spent with her father and mother watching Bob Hope.



## Chapter 18: I Ran and I Ran and I Ran

In 1977, President Carter was hosting a visit to the White House by the Shah of Iran and his wife. All Iranians living in America were invited to attend the celebration. The government would pay all expenses for their trips. Kazem eagerly accepted; however, his sons warned him not to go because of the planned protests that might become violent. Undeterred, Kazem, Nazireh, and Firoozeh were soon on their way to the nation's capital in first class seats.

As Kazem and his family waited on the street to welcome the Shah, masked demonstrators were marching across the way from them. When gunfire was sounded to herald the approach of the Shah's limo, the demonstrators made a mad dash for the Iranians across from them. Many were beaten and bloodied. Kazem rushed his family away. They boarded a bus to escape, not even knowing where it was heading. The bus was a tour bus that took them on a three-hour tour of the capital. The family left that night on a flight out of D.C.





# Chapters 19 through 21

## Chapters 19 through 21 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 19: Iranians Need Not Apply

Kazem had worked for the National Iranian Oil Company from the time he was seventeen years old. He had worked himself up from intern to project manager. With thirty plus years with the company, he felt he had no worries about his future. However, after the Iranian Revolution, his world changed. Since he was an expert in building new refineries, his expertise was no longer valuable. He asked for and was granted early retirement. He felt certain he could easily get a job in America. He did get an engineering job at an American company within a weeks. But soon after he began his new job, the American hostages were taken and Kazem was laid off.

For 444 nights, the family watched TV hoping for a break in the hostage situation. With each day, hatred grew for Iran and all Iranians including those in America. T-shirts were sold that said "Iranians Go Home" or "Iranians Wanted for Target Practice." Kazem was 58, unemployed and had no prospects for work. He returned to Iran and sold their house and all their belongings. Irani Americans were among the most well-educated and productive group of immigrants in America. Kazem himself loved America and was the model immigrant. But after the revolution, Kazem was reduced to just a foreigner with an accent and was considered by many to be an enemy.

Kazem agreed to take an executive position with a Saudi company that operated in the US. Just before the final papers were signed, Kazem was told the deal was off because company policy disallowed them from hiring an Iranian. They thought he was an Arab. Next, Kazem was hired by a Nigerian oil company where he would earn a generous salary for overseeing refinery start-ups. His first paycheck bounced and soon the word came that the company was run by a con man who was being deported. After the hostage crisis ended, Kazem was hired by an American company at half the salary he was used to. However, he did not complain since he was happy to have a job to go to every day. He expressed his sadness that the America he loved had turned on an entire group of people because of the actions of a few.

### Chapter 20: Girls Just Wanna have Funds

As a young teen, Firoozeh began taking on odd jobs to save for college. Babysitting did not pay enough. She took a part-time job at a movie theater at the concession stand. It was a boring and joyless job and did not pay much. Finally, she found something she was good at, enjoyed, and earned money for college. She wrote numerous essays for scholarships. She told about her life and experiences, including when she acted as her mother's interpreter and when she volunteered to be a clown at a children's hospital. To her delight, the money flowed in.



## Chapter 21: Joyeuse Noelle

Having taken French since the seventh grade, Firoozeh entered a competition at school in which the participants had one hour to prepare a speech in French on the subject of "Responsibility Toward Technology." First prize was two months at the Alliance Francaise in Paris. Those who entered had to attest to the fact that their families did not speak French. Firoozeh's father knew a little French but not enough to disqualify her. Her family spoke English and Persian. Her father also spoke Shushtari, an ancient Persian language.

Firoozeh was the youngest entrant but won the contest. After arriving at the airport in Paris, Firoozeh's host family welcomed her and happily opened the many gifts she brought them. Firoozeh looked forward to learning about Paris from them but to her surprise the next day they left for vacation and would not be back until she returned to America. Firoozeh asked the apartment manager, Noelle, if she knew of a Bastille celebration she could attend. Noelle was thrilled and said they could attend the parade together. The teachers at the Alliance Francaise were disappointing. They were all very young and obviously resentful that they were spending their summer teaching school. Firoozeh made no friends during her time in Paris. It was a lonely two months but she was able to improve her French since she was on her own most of the time.



# Chapters 22 through 24

## Chapters 22 through 24 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 22: The Wedding

Firoozeh had to tell her parents that Francois' parents were thrilled that they were going to marry. If Kazem had an inkling that they disapproved, that would have ended the relationship. In reality, his mother had said that Firoozeh could never set foot in her house. Her parents knew she was dating someone, but dating was a bizarre concept to them since everyone in their generation had married through arrangement. Firoozeh's parents liked Francois right away even though they had always hoped she would marry an Iranian doctor. Although Francois' parents reluctantly agreed to attend the wedding along with one sister, most of his other relatives declined to attend.

Francois and Firoozeh agreed to be married in both a Catholic mass and in a traditional Persian ceremony. The Persian ceremony was held at Uncle Ali's house—Kazem and Nazireh's condo was too small. After the ceremony, everyone hugged and kissed and took pictures and hugged and kissed some more. Abundant kissing is an Iranian tradition. The reception was held at a Indian-Chinese restaurant near the airport. Although the restaurant was paid for in advance, a large Indian man stood in front of the door and would not let anyone in unless Kazem paid an extra \$400. Since guests were arriving, there was no option and Kazem got soaked for the extra amount. The restaurant put on a feast including Indian and Persian dishes. The guests danced until all hours.

### Chapter 23: I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet

After getting married, Firoozeh and Francois moved to San Francisco. One day after work, a strong earthquake hit. Firoozeh was home alone and thought the apartment building was falling down. She called her father to tell him she was okay. He hadn't heard about the earthquake and didn't see to think it was a big deal. She called her mother-in-law who only inquired whether the china she gave them was broken. Firoozeh had helped an elderly woman in her building during the earthquake. The woman, Golda, came every month thereafter with a chocolate Bundt cake to thank her for looking after her. Firoozeh thought the china was bad karma. It had not been damaged but she wanted to get rid of it but not want give it back to her mother-in-law. She donated it to an auction that was being held at a near-by hospital. They wouldn't have it to pass on to their children but she and Francois could pass on good values to them which were priceless.

### Chapter 24: A Nose by Any Other Name

In Iran, an ugly nose on a girl cannot be overcome even by intelligence, wit, or charm. Firoozeh had a hooked nose like her mother's side of the family but it was not horrific.



She consulted a plastic surgeon when she was eighteen, but decided against the surgery. Firoozeh had always remembered the librarian at school who had the biggest nose she had ever seen. Yet, the woman was obviously confident and pleased with herself. Twenty years later, Firoozeh happened upon a TV news show that was interviewing nudists and to Firoozeh's surprise, being interviewed was the big-nosed librarian.. Being nude, the woman told the reporter, helped her gain self-confidence. It made Firoozeh sad to think of all the young Iranian women who think so little of themselves that they are willing to go through pain and risk just to have smaller noses.



# Chapters 25 and 26

## Chapters 25 and 26 Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 25: Judges Paid Off

One of Firoozeh's brothers gave them a free trip to the Bahamas. Unfortunately, it was spring break when they arrived in Nassau and the island was crowded with noisy drunks. They learned they could take a mail boat to one of the other islands. They hopped on the Spanish Rose early one morning and several hours later landed on an island called Spanish Wells. The only hotel on the island was vacant, except for them, during their entire stay. The owner of the hotel dropped by their table at lunch to say hello. To Firoozeh's surprise, the man was from her hometown and had worked at the same company as Kazem.

The owner of another restaurant asked if Firoozeh and Francois would serve as judges at the island's beauty contest. It was difficult to find judges on the small island who were not related to the contestants. Although not fans of beauty contests, Firoozeh and Francois agreed. There were two other judges, a former Miss Bahamas and a drunken Canadian. Six girls were competing in the contest. The girls competed in a swimsuit and talent competitions and had to articulate their opinion on some general question. The judges all agreed that the most articulate contestant was the winner. The girl they selected was a little heavy and the least attractive but she seemed to be the most intelligent. When the winner was announced, the audience grew very angry and the prettiest girl, who thought she would win, was sobbing on stage. Firoozeh and Francois ran back to their hotel followed by a number of people chanting that the contest was fixed and that the judges had been paid off to select the winner.

### Chapter 26: If I Were a Rich Man

Early on, money had never been an issue for Firoozeh's family. The oil company that Kazem worked for provided a furnished house and paid for all necessary repairs. There were clubhouses and swimming pools at the disposal of the company's employees. When the family moved to American, everything seemed incredibly expensive. However, after the Iranian Revolution, American products seemed like bargains. Repairs were too expensive to have done so Kazem became the fix-it man. After Kazem worked on the plumbing, the hot water came out of the cold tap. He told his family not to complain that the pattern in wallpaper he put up did not match exactly.

After fixing everything in his house, Kazem focused on the repairs that needed to be done in his kid's houses. He painted and patched some of the walls in Farshid's New York penthouse, using a white that didn't quite match the rest of the apartment. He installed a medicine cabinet in Firoozeh's bathroom. It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been crooked. Kazem thought it was a waste to eat out. He would calculate how much each meal actually cost as opposed to what they were charged. When Kazem



and Nazireh went to Iran, they stayed in a suite at the Sheraton in Tehran which was the only place they could afford such accommodations because of the devalued Iranian currency. Kazem donated the pension he got from his retirement every year to charities. His donations helped pay for surgeries, medicines and eyeglasses for the needy. Firoozeh asked how it felt to come back to America after being treated like a rich man in Iran. He told his daughter that he was a rich man in America, too, but that he just did not have a lot of money.



# Characters

## Firoozeh Dumas

Firoozeh was just seven years old when her family moved from Abadan, Iran, to the Los Angeles, California, suburb of Whittier. Firoozeh could only speak Persian but was a quick study and caught on to English quite easily. She became so fluent that she became her mother's interpreter. Nazireh never totally mastered the language, calling everything from her husband to the kitchen table "it." She also had the uncanny ability to speak English with the use of absolutely no verbs. But she had Firoozeh who people declared to be a genius—they were amazed that the tiny girl was fluent in English and Persian.

Firoozeh had more adjustments to make in the new country than just to language. She had to become accustomed to new holidays celebrated in the country. In Iran they celebrated Nowruz, which was their new year. No one had heard of it in America. She felt left out at some holidays, especially Christmas, when the country was obsessed with trees, gifts and Santa Claus. She was always glad when December was over although her family did enjoy the Bob Hope Christmas special.

Firoozeh has many adventures in her new land. Most are fun and harmless while some present challenges. She got lost at Disneyland and was terrified until her father anxiously showed up to claim her. Firoozeh spent two weeks at summer camp where she was unable to make one friend or take one bath. Her family was modest and would never shower in front of strangers. There were lonely times like during some holidays. There were scary times as well. Masked and armed Iranian protestors chased her and her family away from a welcoming party for the Shah of Iran in Washington, D. C. Firoozeh and her family felt the sting of prejudice during the Iranian hostage crises when Americans began to look with suspicious eyes at all Iranians in America.

Through good times and difficult ones, the family stayed close and supported each other. Firoozeh, like her father, grew to love America and settled there after she married. Also like her father, she always held her homeland close to her heart.

## Kazem

Kazem is Firoozeh's father. Kazem had long been a fan of America when he moved his family there. Kazem, an engineer and employee of the National Iranian Oil Company, was assigned to a two-year project as a consultant for an American company. Kazem loved the Americans and was thrilled with the prospect of bringing his family there. The memories of his years in graduate school in both Texas and California were positive and made him anxious to return. He felt fortunate that he had earned a Fulbright grant to attend graduate school in America. When a college professor invited him to spend Easter vacation in his home, the lonely Kazem gladly accepted. There was another



guest that weekend—none other than Albert Einstein. That meeting confirmed to Kazem that magical things happened in America.

When he moved his family to America, Kazem assured Firoozeh and his wife, Nazireh, that he would act as interpreter for them since they spoke only Persian. Kazem was very confident of his English. However, it wasn't very long before Firoozeh and Nazireh realized that no one could understand a word he was saying! Kazem was very frugal and always thinking of ways to save or make money. He and his brother would visit the Price Club for lunch—there was no restaurant there but they filled up on free samples. Sure of his abilities, he thought he could make his fortune on Bowling for Dollars. He was so nervous when he appeared, he only knocked down seven pins and won just \$7. The family stopped watching Bowling for Dollars on TV after that. Kazem would frequently take the family to Las Vegas which provided another chance for him to make a killing. He usually lost all his money on the blackjack table but blamed his bad luck on anyone nearby who was wearing a hat or had red hair.

Kazem went through a rough time during the Iranian hostage crisis and revolution. The friendly Americans who he always bragged about seemed to look at him with different eyes. He lost his job of thirty years and had a difficult time finding one due to his nationality. But just as in the good times, Kazem had a positive outlook during the down times. He knew that it didn't take money to be a rich man and never turned on his adopted country. Throughout his many years in America, he grew to love the country and was grateful for the opportunities it gave him and his family. However; he never lost sight of this love and loyalty to his homeland.

## **Nazireh**

Nazireh is Firoozeh's mother and Kazem's wife. She liked the American life although she never caught on to English that well and preferred preparing Persian food for her family over American food. She was forever grateful for all the kindnesses extended to her daughter by Americans.

## **Uncle Nematollah**

Uncle Nematollah is Kazem's younger brother. He is also a renowned physician in Iran. He visited Kazem for several months and sampled every American fast food he and Kazem could find. Uncle Nematollah had to work off two inches from his waistline before he returned to Iran.

## **Farshid**

Farshid is one of Firoozeh's brother. He is a charismatic person who has obvious leadership qualities. As he matured, everyone in the family came to him for advice before any important events.





## **Farid**

Farid is Firoozeh's older brother. He lived in Philadelphia with an uncle before the rest of the family moved to the United States. He wanted to go to a good high school so he could be accepted to one of American's top colleges.

## **Francois Dumas**

Francois Dumas is Firoozeh's husband. They met when they were both students at Berkeley. Francois' family was against the marriage but it took place nonetheless. They had both a Catholic mass and a traditional Persian ceremony performed for their wedding.

## **Sedigh**

Sedigh is Firoozeh's favorite aunt. Sedigh had sons but no daughters. Firoozeh was like a daughter to Sedigh. Firoozeh always remembered the fragrant aroma of Sedigh's flower garden.

## **Albert Einstein**

When Kazem was a graduate student in Texas, his professor invited him to spend the Easter break with him. Another friend of the professor's joined them who was none other than Albert Einstein.

## **Aunt Parvine**

Kazem was never able to teach Firoozeh to swim. Her Aunt Parvine was a noted physician who lived in Switzerland. When the family visited Aunt Parvine, she was certain she could teach Firoozeh to swim. When she failed, she offered the diagnosis that Firoozeh was built like a rock and therefore would never be able to swim.



# Objects/Places

## Iran

Firoozeh and her family emigrated from Abadan, Iran, to the United States when she was seven years old.

## Whittier, CA

Kazem moved his family from Iran to Whittier, CA, a suburb of Los Angeles, when he accepted a two-year assignment as a consultant to an American company.

## Disneyland

To Kazem, the most magical spot in the world was Disneyland. He considered Walt Disney a genius and the Pirates of the Caribbean ride as the most outstanding invention of mankind.

## Newport Beach, CA

The family relocated to Newport Beach, CA, for another consulting job that Kazem accepted. Everyone except the gardeners and nannies were blond and beautiful in Newport Beach.

## UC Berkeley

Firoozeh attended college at UC Berkeley which is where she met her future husband, Francois Dumas, who was also a student there.

## San Francisco, CA

After Firoozeh and Francois were first married, they lived on a third floor apartment in San Francisco which was during the time that a very strong earthquake hit. Firoozeh thought the building was going to tumble over.

## Washington D.C.

All Iranians in America were invited to welcome the Shah of Iran on his visit to the White House. The celebration was short-lived for Firoozeh and her family when protestors of the Shah began running after them.

## **Switzerland**

Aunt Parvine, who was a noted physician, lived in Switzerland. Kazem brought his family there for a visit during which time Aunt Parvine tried but failed to teach Firoozeh to swim.

## **Caspian Sea**

Firoozeh recalled family vacations on the coast of Iran on the Caspian Sea. The buoyant waters of the Caspian enabled Firoozeh to teach herself to swim.

## **Texas A&M**

When he was in his early twenties, Kazem was shocked when he was notified that he had won a Fulbright grant to attend graduate school in America. He was accepted in the graduate engineering program at Texas A&M.

# Themes

## Language Barriers

When Firoozeh first arrived in America, she and her mother spoke only Persian. Firoozeh's father spoke English but not as well as he thought since his English was difficult for others to understand. Firoozeh was able to learn English quickly and soon became fluent. That can be attributed to her young age, when brains are sponges, and the fact that she was in an English-speaking school where she was forced to assimilate quickly. Nazireh, her mother, did not work outside the home and therefore she was able to get by with just limited English. She picked up most of her English from watching American television. Even after thirty years in the US, Nazireh spoke very broken English with a heavy accent. Firoozeh commented, rather comically, that her mother managed to speak without the use of verbs and that she called everything "it," from her husband to the kitchen table. Had Nazireh been required to find a job, her English would have been, by necessity, much improved. Nazireh used seven-year-old Firoozeh as her interpreter most of the time.

Kazem had learned English as a young man without a wife and children when he attended graduate school in Texas and California. Since he was able to communicate well enough in school with his professors and peers, he had grown to think his English was fluent. However, in the rather isolated world of engineering school, he had little contact outside academia. Once he was thrown into American society when he moved with his family to California, it became obvious that he was not fluent in English especially in casual, day-to-day language. He was confused by idioms such as "hot dogs" and "mud pies," and intended no double-meaning when he referred to drivers who honked their horns repeatedly as "horny."

Firoozeh's family represents three different experiences with living in a country with a new language. Kazem's experience illustrates that college-level students from foreign nations who do well enough with language in their relatively small circle at school face a second barrier when they attempt to communicate using their new language in society at large. Firoozeh's easy transition to fluent English can be attributed to her young age and a school setting that required her to learn the language quickly. Nazireh never became fluent in English because of her isolation, many years of speaking a different language and because she had others who could interpret for her.

## Ethnic Bias

When Firoozeh Dumas and her family first arrived in America, they were amazed and gratified by the kindness of the Americans. At the time they immigrated, not many Americans were familiar with Iran or its people and traditions. The friendly Americans were curious and eager to learn about the nation where women were covered from head to toe and the national language was the exotic-sounding Persian. Dumas is quick



to add that the many questions Americans had about her country and traditions were always done in a mannerly and kind fashion. However, as time passed and more and more Iranian immigrants appeared in American society, resentment began to grow about their presence especially after the Iranian Revolution.

Although most of Dumas' book is comic and light, there are episodes included in which ethnic bias rears its ugly head. During the tense Iranian hostage crisis that lasted over a year, Iranians in America began to be viewed with suspicion and resentment. Kazem, who had worked for thirty years as an engineer at one company, lost his job and could not find a new one until after the crisis passed. Kazem, the most comic character in the book, maintained his love for America but lamented that all Iranians were being blamed for the actions of just a few. The bias against the Iranians at the time was not limited to Americans. Kazem was initially hired by a Saudi company who thought he was an Arab. When they learned his national identity, they told him they could not hire him. His qualifications were overshadowed by the Saudi's prejudice.

When the Americans viewed Firoozeh and her family as a kind of innocent novelty, they were welcoming and gracious. However, there had to have been an underlying bias within many of those people since they were so quick to judge them when the going got tough.

## Culture Shock

There are many examples of culture shock in Firoozeh Dumas' book, "Funny in Farsi." Of course, language is one of the first challenges that an immigrant must deal with when coming to a new country. There are also cultural differences with which they must deal. For example, when Firoozeh goes to summer camp she is shocked that she would be expected to bathe in front of others. The Iranian culture is very modest and does not condone a person being unclothed in the presence of another. Since Firoozeh could not bring herself to shower in an open area, the eleven-year-old went a two full weeks without a bath.

Many non-Christian immigrants, like Firoozeh and her family members, find it difficult to endure the month of December since Christmas is America's number one holiday and the evidences of it are "in your face" and impossible to escape. Although Firoozeh was generally treated kindly by her American friends, she was never invited to the Christmas parties held by her friends. Her exclusion could have been for one of two reasons: the others assumed she would not come or those holding parties did not think it appropriate to invite a non-Christian to a celebration of Christ. Firoozeh and others who did not or could not participate in Christmas celebrations felt the most separated from other Americans at that time of the year. The biggest holiday in Iran was Nowruz, a celebration of the new year. Being in America, Firoozeh and her family had to almost abandon this holiday since it wasn't as much fun or exciting celebrating it alone.

There were upsides to the cultural differences that Dumas noted in her book. Her father, Kazem, could never get over how friendly Americans were—the waitresses always had

smiling faces. He was always stunned by the clean bathrooms in restaurants and the clear signage that was on the streets, which were obviously elements lacking in his homeland. The most important difference between Iran and America, was that in the United States it was just as important for daughters in a family to be educated as it was for the sons.

# Style

## Perspective

"Funny in Farsi" is written by Firoozeh Dumas who emigrated to the United States from Iran with her family. The story begins when seven-year-old Firoozeh, who spoke only Persian at the time, was quickly indoctrinated into the American culture and assimilated into the English language since she was required to immediately begin attending school. Having been central to the episodes and experiences that she describes, no one could provide more insight than Dumas as to the feelings, reactions and barriers that she and her family faced.

"Funny is Farsi" lives up to its name since the book has a comic and light touch throughout. Even in potentially dangerous and serious situations, Dumas keeps them delicately balanced with her airy recounting of them. Although Firoozeh and her family were faced with ethnic bias, particularly during the Iranian revolution that sparked the tense Iranian hostage crisis, Dumas displays no bitterness or resentment in describing them. She portrays these unpleasant encounters in an honest and genuine manner and resists any opportunity to lecture and admonish.

Due to the young age she was when she became an immigrant in America, Dumas was able to gain from "growing up" in America yet maintain a connection to the culture of her homeland. It was with this unique perspective that Dumas successfully and honestly presents an anecdotal story of immigrants adjusting to life in the United States.

## Tone

"Funny in Farsi" is a lighthearted take on an Iranian family's experience when they immigrated from Iran to America. The author, Firoozeh Dumas, was only seven years old when she and her family moved from Abadan, Iran, to a suburb outside Los Angeles, California. Dumas relates many comic episodes about the family's transition. Her mother's difficulty with English is portrayed in a light way. Nazireh learned her English from *The Price Is Right* and *Let's Make a Deal*. She used her seven-year-old daughter to interpret for her. The bright seven-year-old knew that she wasn't really the genius Americans thought she was in her ability to speak both Persian and English.

Kazem is portrayed as the funniest member of the family. His frugality led him to try out for *Bowling for Dollars* where he thought he would find his pot of gold. After the nervous Kazem made his TV debut and knocked down only seven pins and winning just \$7, the family from then on opted to watch *Sonny and Cher* over *Bowling for Dollars*. Kazem was sure he'd someday make a killing in Las Vegas but usually lost all his money on the blackjack table. He blamed his lack of good luck on any nearby red-headed man or on anyone wearing a hat. However, Kazem attributed the majority of his bad luck on any "foreigner" sitting at the blackjack table. He failed to remember his official immigrant

status! The only place that Kazem liked to "eat out" was at the Price Club where he and his younger brother would fill up on samples.

Even in the face of some potentially tragic events, Dumas applies her light touch. Lost at Disneyland, seven-year-old Firoozeh focuses on the way the attendants and other lost kids behaved rather than on her own fears. Dumas goes on to elaborate on how she milked the situation by getting whatever toy she wanted from her guilt-ridden father for several weeks after the incident. Dumas tempers the frightening experience the family had when they were nearly attacked by masked Iranians protesting the arrival of the Shah in Washington, DC, by describing their escape to safety was on a tedious three-hour bus tour of all the monuments of the city.

Dumas' sense of humor and fun in "Funny in Farsi," connects with the reader, making the book a quick and enjoyable read.

## Structure

"Funny in Farsi" is separated into twenty plus small chapters. Although the beginning of the book begins when Firoozeh was a young girl and had just arrived in America, the book as a whole does not follow in a strictly chronological order. The structure of the book is rather loose and provides an episodic, anecdotal approach in telling the story of Iranian immigrants in America.

Following the main book, there is an Afterword that was written by Firoozeh after "Funny in Farsi" was first published. It contains reactions from family and friends to the book and even includes a response from her second grade teacher. The section includes a photograph of Kazem and Nazireh from 1957 when the family was still in Iran.

The section of the book following the afterword, entitled, "A Reader's Guide," contains two sub-sections. "A Conversation between Khaled Hosseini and Firoozeh Dumas" contains a documented conversation between Firoozeh and another famous writer from Iran, Khaled Hosseini, who wrote the best seller "The Kite Runner." In this section, the two Iranian writers conduct a lighthearted interview of one another. The final sub-section, "Reading Group Questions and Topics for Discussion," provides questions and debate points for classes or groups to use in discussing the contents of the book.





## Quotes

"Having spent several years in Texas and California as a graduate student, my father often spoke about America with the eloquence and wonder normally reserved for a first love" (Chapter 1, pg. 3.)

"[Nazireh] would speak entire paragraphs without using any verbs. She referred to everyone and everything as "it," leaving the listener wondering whether she was talking about her husband or the kitchen table" (Chapter 2, pg. 8.)

"One attraction that stood apart. . .one that generated near religious devotion: [was] Disneyland. My father believed that Walt Disney was a genius, a man whose vision allowed everyone, regardless of age, to relive the wonderment of childhood" (Chapter 4, pg.17.)

"I was lucky to have come to America years before the political upheaval in Iran. The Americans we encountered were kind and curious, unafraid to ask questions and willing to listen" (Chapter 6, pg. 31.)

"Coming from a modest culture and an even more modest family, I had never seen another person naked, not even my mother, so the idea that someone could walk into the bathroom while I was naked in the shower seemed unbelievable. I decided then and there not to bathe" (Chapter 8, pg. 46.)

"I tried to explain to him that for me, a vacation does not involve certain hardships including, but not limited to mosquitoes, vaccinations, poor plumbing, or stomach ailments. Having grown up in southern Iran, I experienced enough physical discomforts to make me truly appreciate a nice resort" (Chapter 10, pg. 59.)

Because of him [Kazem], his siblings and their families ended up in Southern California where they all live with in half an hour of one another. 'I am the Christopher Columbus of the family,' he always says" (Chapter 12, pg. 68.)

"He dreamed that someday, he would return to America with his own children. And they, the children of an engineer from Abadan, would have access to the same educational opportunities as anybody else, even the sons of senators and the rich. It was a dream that my brothers and I were honored to fulfill" (Chapter 13, pg. 95.)

"It's not what we eat or don't eat that makes us good people; it's how we treat one another...There are good and bad people in every religion. Just because someone is



Muslim, Jewish, or Christian doesn't mean a thing - you have to look and see what's in their hearts" (Chapter 14, pg. 87.)

"At times like this, I yearned for the simpler days of yore, when Christmas meant watching Bob Hope sing his version of 'White Christmas' as my parents and I slumped on the sofa in our summer clothes in the warm Newport Beach weather" (Chapter 15, pg. 110.)

"Throughout his job ordeal, my father never complained. He remained an Iranian who loved his native country but who also believed in American ideals. He only said how sad it was that people so easily hate an entire population simple because of the actions of a few" (Chapter 19, pg. 121.)

"After his last trip, I asked him if it was hard to return to America, where he is far from wealth. 'But, Firoozeh,' he said, 'I'm a rich man in America, too. I just don't have a lot of money'" (Chapter 26, pg. 187.)



## Topics for Discussion

Why did Kazem love America? How did Kazem feel about Iran? What obstacles did he encounter in America? What benefits did he derive?

How did Americans treat Iranians when Kazem first came to America? How was the treatment of Iranians by Americans different after the Iranian Revolution? What incident caused many Americans to resent the presence of Iranians in the US?

What employment difficulties did Kazem encounter after the Iranian revolution? What experience did he have with a Saudi oil company? What experience did he have with a Nigerian oil company? What event took the pressure off Iranians who lived in America? When and where did he finally secure employment?

What challenge did the language barrier cause for Firoozeh and her family? How did her mother adjust to English? Who did Nazireh use for her interpreter? Why did many people think that Firoozeh was a genius? What language do most Iranians speak?

What difficulties did Firoozeh face when she and Francois planned to be married? How did her family react? How did his family react? What type of marriage ceremony was performed at their wedding?

What holiday season often made Firoozeh feel left out? What did Firoozeh and her family enjoy most about Christmas? How did Firoozeh celebrate Christmas as a mother with small children? What was the most celebrated holiday in Iran?

What were Firoozeh's experiences at summer camp? Why was her sleeping bag so large? Why was she forced to carry her sleeping bag in? Why did she feel lonely at summer camp and why didn't she bathe the entire time she was there?