



GHOST & CO.

BOUTIQUE BOOK PACKAGERS

# Before the Chador

— ONE FAMILY, TWO REVOLUTIONS —



# BEFORE THE CHADOR

## ONE FAMILY, TWO REVOLUTIONS

Book Proposal  
by James Dunn

### PROPOSED SPECS:

Hardcover w/dust jacket  
7 x 10 inches (17.78 x 25.4 cm)  
over 200 color photographs  
288 pages

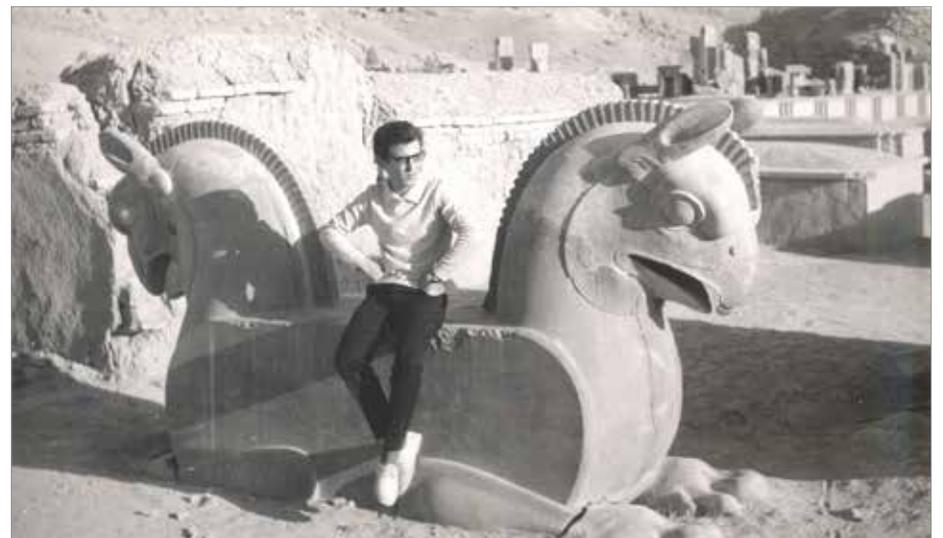
### ABOUT BEFORE THE CHADOR

With thousands of years, and access to oil reserves, having shaped its history of conquests and occupations, tremendous artistic and cultural achievements, political rebellion, and outspoken leaders, Iran is a country that attracts constant media attention. For all of the turmoil the country has endured over the centuries, the 1979 revolution, during which the Western-backed Shah was ousted by Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic republic, is one of the touchstone's of the contemporary geopolitical climate in the Middle East. But for all the political bluster and sweeping generalizations, Iran is populated by over 78-million individuals, all of them with their own stories that veer from and contradict the media narratives that serve as the means for most outsiders to understand this country.

*Before the Chador* tells the remarkable story of a Jewish Iranian family. We first meet its members many years before 1979, and follow their lives,

and how they changed after the revolution, from the town of Esfahan to Tehran and eventually Los Angeles. The family in question is related to James Dunn who, after discovering an extensive collection of literally several hundred family photographs, set out to collect the stories from his relatives, recording hundreds of hours of interviews. The story that unfolds relates how dramatically Iran changed between the 1940s and today, challenging assumptions, celebrating the strong bonds of family, and the realities of how even the strongest bonds can break under government pressures and interference.

At the center of the story is Haroun, a silk trader in the tradition of his father, who in his hometown of Esfahan was known as “adele” (Farsi for “righteous”). His neighbors regularly sought him out to mediate family disputes, but his trade kept him on the road most of the year. He sent letters home to his wife, Doolat, and their nine children. Their home was the center of town because Haroun was unlike most men of the era; he was not religious, misogynistic, or judgmental although the culture around him became increasingly so. Haroun raised two large families through two world wars before his daughter Ashraph married a Muslim (after a



1963: PERSEPOLIS; VISITED DURING THE AUTHOR'S PARENTS' HONEYMOON.

contentious courtship). While Haroun and his family remained supportive of Ashraph, the community saw things differently, and the family relocated to Tehran. In the metropolis, as the revolution brewed and its ramifications rippled in the aftermath, members of the family laundered money, sold drugs, fought wars, became political activists, served time in prison, and some of them left the country. But dispersed by two exoduses—one from Esfahan and another from Iran—the family remained closer-knit than other families faced to endure similar trials. Because of religion, politics, and other circumstances that worked against them, love endured.

The first-person narratives translated from Farsi, along with the arresting photographs, many from a time before the government told people how to behave, reveal an intimate and harrowing tale of loving family members pitted against social and political changes that did not take individual happiness into consideration. *Before the Chador* gives faces to some of these individuals who wanted little more than to be happy.

## AUTHOR BIO

**James Dunn** was born to a British father and Iranian Jewish mother in spring of 1979, days after his parents fled Iran in the wake of the Islamic Revolution. Family, job opportunities and visa conflicts moved him from Iran to England to Libya to Portugal through his childhood before settling in 1992 in Los Angeles, home of the Iranian post-revolution diaspora. An accomplished hip-hop journalist, he interviewed artists like Nas, 50 Cent, and Outkast for magazines like *The Source*, *Vibe*, and *XXL* before editing *Rime Magazine* for five years. Today he owns and operates Dunn Deal PR, a music and culture public relations firm.

## MARKET ASSESSMENT

*Iran is constantly in the news: Before the Chador* documents a bygone era in Iran, but it shows, at an intimate personal level, how the country came to exist as it does today.

*A story that defies common perceptions:* The media addresses Iran with sweeping generalities and those inform how much of the world views the nation and its citizens; *Before the Chador* is sure to appeal to anyone interested in Iranian late-twentieth century history, contemporary world affairs, and stories of individuals overcoming formidable hurdles.

*A singular collection of family photographs and stories that defy assumptions:* This collection of several hundred photographs (all of which have already been drum scanned) and the accompanying transcribed and translated stories present a novel-like story, but this is no fiction.

## SIMILAR TITLES

- *Drinking Arak Off an Ayatollah's Beard: A Journey Through the Inside-Out Worlds of Iran and Afghanistan* by Nicholas Jubber (Da Capo, 2010)
- *Shadi Ghadirian: A Woman Photographer from Iran* by Rose Issa (Saqi, 2009)
- *Kaveh Golestan: Recording the Truth in Iran 1950-2003* by Masoud Benhoud, Hojat Sepahvand, Malu Halasa and Kaveh Golestan (Hatje Cantz, 2008)
- *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution* by Pardis Mahdavi (Stanford University Press, 2008)
- *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ* by Hooman Majd (Doubleday, 2008)

## PARVIZ: COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

**D**ATING HAD RULES. Parties would happen all the time, so if I was interested in a girl I'd ask her, Are you going to the party on Friday? The girl would come with a girlfriend, classmate, cousin, or neighbor. In the early stages of the courtship there would never be any kissing. The mentality was that if a boy was truly interested in a girl, he wouldn't touch her or exhibit any kind of sexual innuendo. If you didn't care for her, then you might. Since virginity was extremely important, sex out of wedlock was a big no-no. After a certain point you might touch, kiss, have oral sex, anal sex, but virginity would stay virginity. The guy that a girl eventually married would raise hell if she wasn't a virgin.



When I was a young man, my friend, my cousin and I pooled our money together and rented an apartment. We didn't live there; we took turns using it whenever we had a date we wanted to take home.

Sometimes, a family member would say something like, I know a girl, she's from a nice family, beautiful, educated; why don't you go see her? At the same time, they'd be talking to her family about that boy. The boy would ask the girl for a date, they'd go to dinner, and pursue something more if they chose. Over the course of twenty years, I must have gone on at least seventy or eighty of these sorts of pre-arranged dates. Other times, the boy's mother would go to the girl's, to check out her and her family. If the boy's mother felt the girl was a good match for her son, she'd take her son somewhere to see the girl, just look at her, from a distance, like a party or a gathering, or more commonly from across the street as she walked to school. Then they would go and ask for her hand. Of course, by that time negotiations would have already taken place between the families. The girl's family would investigate the boy's background, too. Who is this guy? Who is his family? Who was his father? Who was his grandfather? Who was his grandfather? Is he educated? How much money does he have? Neither side would allow the meeting unless they shared an understanding. There was one girl in particular that I liked very much. She was young, 18. I was 28, nearing the end of my military duty. I was making arrangements to move to America when someone told me about her. We went out a few

times, but I got cold feet. I thought to myself, Here's an 18-year-old girl, right out of high school, who has never spent one night out of her parents' house, and I'm going to move her across the world. In those days, most hospitals required doctors to live onsite three days or more a week, so she'd be alone a lot. She'd go bananas. My income was going to be \$273 every two weeks. It wouldn't have been fair to her, and it wouldn't have been fair to me to worry about it. I called everything off and left for America. I heard she became very heartbroken and married the first man that came around.

Love is a very, very complicated thing. Feelings that seem to be love at one time in life may not turn out to be. Most girls in Iran had restricted lives, controlling parents. They couldn't wait to leave home. Then some boy would come along, give them a little bit of attention, and these girls would think they were in love, but often it was more like an open window they could jump out. Not even a door.



All my girlfriends were Muslim. Thanks to work and school, I was much more in contact with Muslims than Jews. There was no possibility of marrying a Muslim girl, which acted as a sort of safety net. I didn't want to risk dating a Jewish girl who might say, Okay, let's get married. I didn't have any particular problem marrying a Muslim; I used it as an excuse to stay single. In later times, some Iranian Jewish parents tolerated their kids marrying Muslims, but forty or fifty years ago it was unthinkable. In fact, our family's reaction to Ashraph marrying Nasrallah was the most benign, liberal reaction I had ever heard of. For almost every Iranian Jewish family, any daughter of theirs who would marry a Muslim man was considered dead. Sometimes they'd even go through the standard third day of the dead and seventh day of the dead and month of the dead ritual. Muslims considered any Jew who married a Muslim a Muslim. In their eyes, there were no mixed marriages.



ASHRAPH

Ashraph was a happy, talkative, social girl. Our family grew up in an all Muslim neighborhood in Esfahan. Muslim men always liked Jewish women, and Ashraph was especially beautiful. Most Jewish people lived in neighborhoods that were all Jewish. If we had lived in one of those neighborhoods maybe none of this would have happened.

Several guys used to hang around in front of our house. Gigolo types, young, out of work, playing around. Every time Ashraph would come out, they would approach her. Eventually they softened her up, and they became friendly. Our parents didn't know what was happening. My sister and I knew what was happening more or less, but we were kids, and Ashraph was good to us, so we were loyal to her.

At that time, our uncle lived in our house with his wife, and there was always competition between Ashraph and our uncle's daughter, Muluk. Ashraph was better looking, dressed better, came from a better, wealthier family, and all of this made Muluk jealous. Our family was more up to date; we lived freer. Muluk's family was religious, real fanatics. Meanwhile, our father was a traveling merchant, and wasn't around much to watch over us. Mother couldn't watch after all of us alone.

Nasrallah wanted to marry Ashraph. She refused, knowing that marrying a Muslim was unthinkable. Besides, he scared her. He scared everyone. He was a gangster, like the mafia of Esfahan. He started bothering us a lot. One night he blocked up our front door with bricks and cement. Now my father was paying attention. He saw that every day Ashraph and Muluk were fighting, every day this boy was harassing the family, so he sold the house and we moved to a Jewish area. Everyone thought the Nasrallah thing was over. But still he pursued her.

At the same time, a Jewish suitor from Shiraz soon began courting Ashraph. She wanted to marry him fast because he would be her safe card; she could get married and leave and Nasrallah wouldn't bother her anymore. Our parents approved of the Jewish boy, so plans were made for the families to meet. Also at this time, Muluk was going out with a Muslim boy, who happened to be Nasrallah's best friend. Muluk needed to deflect attention from the fact that she was dating a Muslim, so she ended up giving Nasrallah a school photo of Muluk and Ashraph. Nasrallah cut out Ashraph's head from the photograph, pasted it on the head of an image of a naked woman, made copies, and put them all over the neighborhood. Muluk showed a copy of this photo to Ashraph's suitor, and asked him, You want to marry this woman? He went cold on Ashraph, and Ashraph was beside herself. Pretending to comfort her, Muluk suggested that Nasrallah could find the bastards who did this. So Nasrallah rides in like the knight in shining armor, comforting her with words and promises. Then he turned around and threatened to kill our parents, and don't think he wouldn't have done it. And that's the main reason Ashraph gave in to him, to spare the family. He forced her to marry him. She wasn't in love with him, but little by little she was forced.

One night I found Ashraph crying in bed. I asked her what was wrong. She said she'd dreamed that Nasrallah had kidnapped her. I tried to reassure her that it was just a dream. The next day Nasrallah kidnapped her. Looking back, I realize she'd never had such a dream but that was her way of telling me she was leaving. My mother's uncle went to visit her with our brother Dariush, who was Ashraph's favorite, hoping he'd persuade her to return, but it didn't work. Our father paid someone to try to bribe Nasrallah to let her go, but that didn't work either. Our mother always complained that Ashraph left with her Singer scissors, the only valuable thing in the house.

When they married, there were seven days of celebrating in Esfahan. It was considered it a big achievement to have converted a dirty Jewish girl to Islam. Our family was shunned by the local Jews. Everyone would point at us in the street. I always used to go to this one bread shop. After a while I didn't go there anymore. They would see our mother and spit. Our lives were never the same. Being ostracized drew us closer. It's probably a big reason why we're closer than most Persian families.

After years of this treatment, we moved to Tehran, a couple hundred miles away. It was like coming from England to New York for us. We were lost.



1972: SUMMER VACATION AT CASPIAN SEA, MOTEL GHOO; UNCLE AZIZ AND NAZANIN, ASHRAF, HER SON AMIR, AND HER DAUGHTER FARIDEH, SOFI, SHERLI, PAYAM, AND THE AUTHOR'S PARENTS.



1958: TEHRAN; PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPH OF ETTI, TAKEN IN LALEHZAR DISTRICT.



1969: NOSRAT AVENUE; CONVERTIBLE BURGUNDY BUICK PARKED OUTSIDE AUTHOR'S PARENTS' HOUSE.



1963: TOMB OF HAFEZ; VISITED DURING THE AUTHOR'S PARENTS' HONEYMOON.



1949: CHANCE FAMILY WITH GALDJE AND TOBA.



C. 1955: ESFAHAN; AUTHOR'S GRANDMOTHER SITS AT SPINNING WHEEL IN HER HOME, WHERE SHE ALSO MADE WINE AND ARAGH (GRAPE VODKA) THAT SHE SERVED AT A BAR RUN OUT OF THE HOUSE.



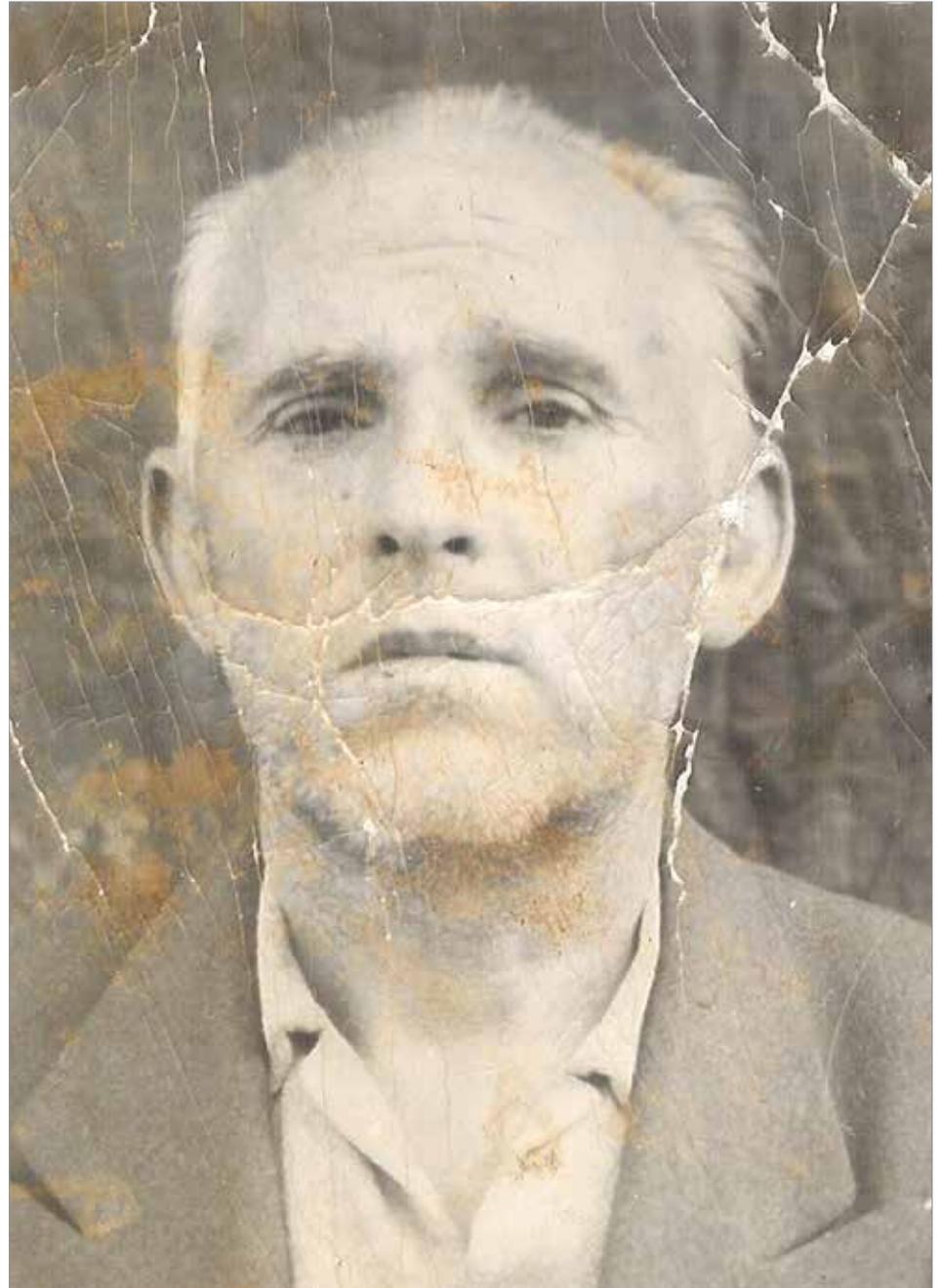
1963: SHAHPUR'S WEDDING, OFFICIATED BY RABBI HAKHAM YEDIDIA.



1955: ESFAHAN; PARVIZ AND AUNT MORVAR VISITING FROM TEHRAN.



1930: ESFAHAN; CHANCE FAMILY WITH THEIR DAUGHTER NAZANIN AND TOBA.



DATE UNKNOWN: PORTRAIT OF HAROUN, THE FAMILY PATRIARCH.



# GHOST & CO.

B O U T I Q U E   B O O K   P A C K A G E R S

Ghost & Company, a newly minted boutique book packager, provides publishers the world over with illustrated books, ranging from affordable, pop culture gift titles to sumptuously produced photography monographs. Ghost & Company brings over twenty years of combined book production experience to every project. We recognize international trends and talent, finessing raw content into books that match the lists of our publisher clients.

Ghost & Company's extensive illustrated book experience results in our ability to shepherd a book from concept to finished product—we can deliver book files or arrange for books to be delivered to a warehouse.

Ghost & Company draws on the collective experience of its co-founders, collaborating with an extensive network of the many individuals that contribute to the creation of a book, from writers and designers to photographers, illustrators, translators, indexers, and proofreaders.

[www.ghostandcompany.com](http://www.ghostandcompany.com)