

THE MAGAZINE FOR SAUDI ARAMCO RETIREES WORLDWIDE

PLEASANT DAYS FALL 2017

# Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah الأيام الجميلة

Ayesha  
Malik  
Portrays  
Her  
Hometown





## 8 Afghanistan Remembered

Robert Hill lived in Afghanistan with his family from 1974–76. He traveled widely, on the job and with his family, meeting a cross-section of Afghan society, including these Turkmen at the weekly *suq* in Aqcha in the north.

## 12 Mighty Hurricanes Roll In; Volunteers Help Out

When Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in August, some retirees in Houston had to flee their homes. Others, like Tonie and Vijay Maheshwari, right, pitched in to help their neighbors. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, a Brat weathered two hurricanes in as many weeks.



## 16 ARAMCO: Above the Oil Fields

Ayesha Malik explores her hometown in a remarkable photobook about Dhahran, depicting what is “momentous and ordinary all at once.” Here she portrays Mysk, a young resident surrounded by her Beanie Babies.

## 20 New Field Guide Displays Dhahran’s Biodiversity

Those with questions about Dhahran’s wild plants, birds and other animals will find answers in the Environmental Protection Dept.’s new book on the town’s biodiversity. Meant for Dhahran residents and employees, it provides information about creatures such as this colorful Common Kingfisher.



### Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah

“Pleasant Days,” is produced for annuitants, families and friends of Aramco, now Saudi Aramco, and its associated companies by Aramco Services Company.

FALL 2017. ISSN-1319-1512

### ADDRESS CORRESPONDENCE TO

The Editor, Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah  
Aramco Services Company  
P.O. Box 2106  
Houston, TX 77252-2106  
arthur.clark@aramcoservices.com

PRESIDENT Basil A. Abul-Hamayel

DIRECTOR, PUBLIC AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT Jamal K. Khudair

EDITOR Arthur Clark

DESIGN Graphic Engine Design Studio



## 22 Rich Photo Collections Help Preserve Heritage

Two vintage photo collections recently donated to top-flight universities in the U.S. and U.K are windows into Saudi Arabia's heritage. This picture, from the T.C. Barger Collection, shows Aramco guide Khamis ibn Rimthan at al-Sarrar in 1939.

## 26 Brat 'Tribe' Reunites

"Two years go by so quickly," says Jenn Harbert (AB75), chronicler of 16th Biennial AramcoBrat Reunion. Her story covers both the good and sad times at this year's gathering of a special "tribe," held Memorial Day weekend in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Smiling attendees included Sue Comfort (DH76), left, and Karen Fogle (AB76).



## 30 Image Awakens Memories

A 1946 photo of Judy Webster and her sister in Ras Tanura, published in *The Arabian Sun* in July, awakened memories for Judy. Here, in a photo taken a couple of years later, she stands left with Dhahran schoolmates Ann Howley, Mary Pat Singelyn, Pat Hills and Ann Barger, and their teacher Mary Leonardini.



Cover: Ayesha Malik adjusts her camera atop a *jabal* on the periphery of Dhahran. Her new photobook, *Aramco: Above the Oil Fields*, reflects the eclectic spirit of her hometown.

أرامكو السعودية  
saudi aramco



★ ★ ★

# HAFLA 2018

COHOSTS BID  
'WARM TEXAS WELCOME TO Y'ALL'



Mark your calendars for a rousing 31st biennial Annuitant's Reunion, a *hafla* set for Sept. 16–19 next year at a scenic resort in the countryside near Austin, Texas. Cohosts Judy and Bill Walker and Vicki and David Jessich promise “a fun time renewing friendships, sharing stories about the good ol’—and new—days, and celebrating our ‘extended family’ as Aramcons.

“As we learned before the reunion in 2010, the special term *hafla* reminds us of our opportunity to join in a ‘friendly gathering, a bash, a family get-together.’ We’re looking forward to spending time with you and we bid a warm Texas welcome to y’all.”

The venue is the Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa (<https://lostpines.regency.hyatt.com/en/hotell/home.html>), a “luxurious Texas wilderness escape” 23 miles east of Austin and 17 miles from Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

“We know you’ll enjoy the beautiful setting,” say the Walkers and Jessichs, noting that the resort is nestled on 405 eye-pleasing acres along the banks of the lower Colorado River, with access to neighboring 1,100-acre McKinney Roughs Nature Park. The cohosts and their team of volunteers are so eager to get the next reunion up and running that they’ve set early registration for Saturday, Sept. 15.

Restaurants and an ice-cream parlor await reunion-goers, and days will end with complimentary s’mores roasts around the fire pit. Amenities and activities include pampering at the spa, golfing, gathering

Sunday with morale groups, and tennis or bridge. Or how about hiking, horseback riding, swimming, floating on a lazy river, kayaking, rafting, archery, trap shooting, hatchet tossing and cycling?

There will be tour opportunities, too. Austin, with its vibrant, historic downtown, is not only the Lone Star State’s capital, but it prides itself on being the “live music capital” of the world. It is the home of The University of Texas, as well as excellent museums, a presidential library and the Circuit of the Americas track. Or guests may wish to explore the nearby town of Bastrop, visit local vineyards or do a little shopping.

Attendees who wish to arrive early or

The scenic Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa near Austin, Texas, is the venue for the 31st Annuitants Reunion, set for Sept. 16–19, 2018.

stay late may take advantage of the discounted reunion rates being offered by the resort three days before and three days after the *hafla*.

The Walkers and Jessichs live near each other in Austin. “We’re enjoying working together to host the *hafla*, and we’re delighted to report we have been contacted by more than 60 annuitants offering to help,” they say.

The Walkers moved to Dhahran in 1979 and departed when Bill retired in 1996. Prior to arriving in the kingdom, he worked



From Conestoga wagon headquarters, reunion cohosts Bill and Judy Walker, left, and David and Vicki Jessich promise “a fun time renewing friendships” next September.

for two years at Aramco Services Company (ASC) in Houston. His career included assignments in the Personnel, Career Development, and Employee Relations Policy and Planning departments. Judy was a librarian in the Corporate and Dhahran Recreation libraries. Their Aramco Brats are Deanna, Bill and Keith.

David Jessich, a Brat himself, grew up

in Ras Tanura and The Hague. After a stint with Aramco as a petroleum engineer in the 1970s, he returned in 1982 and worked in Dhahran, Ras Tanura and 'Udhailiyah. Vicki joined the company in 1990 as an elementary-school teacher and worked in Dhahran and 'Udhailiyah.

They married in 1993, and their children Laura and Brian were born in the kingdom.

They retired in 2004.

More information about reunion activities, the hotel, reunion registration and other details will be available in the Spring issue of *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* and at [AramcoExpats.com](http://AramcoExpats.com). Anyone with questions, suggestions or an interest in volunteering may contact the cohosts at [AustinHafla2018@gmail.com](mailto:AustinHafla2018@gmail.com).

# ★ ★ ★ **BIG** WELCOME 'BACK HOME' PLANNED **FOR 4 TH** **IN-KINGDOM REUNION**

BY ALISON HOOKER



**H**ave you ever had this experience: You start chatting with new friends or neighbors about your time in Saudi Arabia and then, as your excitement grows, you notice their eyes begin to glaze over? They just don't "get it" the way a fellow former Aramcon would!

Hence the value of attending a Saudi Aramco reunion. You meet and spend time with many others whose memories of the kingdom are also indelibly etched on their hearts. They are eager to explore and relive their experiences with you ... and to learn what's happened since your paths diverged. They know what you're talking about!

From Dhahran, we are pleased to announce the formation of the organizational committee to plan the fourth Expatriates Reunion, set for March 11–21, 2019. Previous in-kingdom reunions took place in 2000, 2009 and 2015.

Championed by the indomitable and indefatigable Ali Baluchi, the 2019 Reunion Committee will be kept on track by Chief



Its spirit reflected the 2019 KSA Reunion logo, the reunion team is planning a warm "welcome home." Reunion Champion Ali Baluchi and Chief Coordinator Saeed Al-Ghamdi are seated center, right and left.

Coordinator Saeed Al-Ghamdi. The goal for the reunion, says Baluchi, is "to ensure the visit you are making to Saudi Arabia will accomplish your dreams and wishes while revisiting your second home."

With this objective in mind, a strong team of volunteers from the workforce and the community has already started work on the reunion program. While many will be building on their previous experiences of reunion planning and facilitation, the team has also welcomed some newcomers with fresh ideas and approaches. The makeup of this group promises a unique and quality experience for all attendees.

While program details are still "under

wraps," we can announce that registration for first-time participants will begin April 1, 2018. On Oct. 1, 2018, those who have previously attended an Expatriates

Reunion may register. As further information becomes available, you will be able to access it on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, TumblrBlog and Instagram using the tag "ksareunion."

Whether you wish to reconnect with old friends, neighbors and work colleagues, rediscover the beauty of Arabia's diverse geography and cultural heritage, or simply rekindle special memories, you won't be disappointed. In the context of your own valued contributions to the company, the committee plans to share with you the exciting unfolding story of both Saudi Aramco and Saudi Arabia. We look forward to welcoming you "back home" in 2019!



The Spring 2017 issue included a story about the donation of three Reg Strange paintings, including this one, to the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture by Nancy Suttle and Carolyn Lummus, the daughters of Carl and Myrtle Flint, who grew up in Ras Tanura.

## More Reg Strange Paintings Turn Up

May 21, 2017

Are you still collecting antiquities? I grew up in Ras Tanura and Dhahran from 1952 until 1963. My father Ted Greer worked as an accountant for Aramco.

I have three paintings by Reg Strange and a pictorial account of King Sa'ud's visit to the U.S. in 1957 at the invitation of President Eisenhower. It's a bit water-damaged, but just at the edges.

I was told there were only a few of these made, and I'd be delighted to get it back to the country where I grew up with many fond memories.

Dyanne C. Greer  
dygreer@cox.net

**NOTE:** The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran is interested in receiving donations of notable artifacts, photos and films relating to the history of the company.

## Living It Up At Yellowstone; Loving Trip to India

May 30, 2017

Attached is a picture from the top of Bunsen Peak, an 8,500-foot volcano I can see from my back deck, that I climbed with friends two days ago.

The background is Swan Lake Flats, a good site for birds and grizzly bears, and the Gallatin Mountains.... I saw a mother grizzly with two cubs today, and a peregrine falcon and a beautiful red fox yesterday.

I depart for Old Faithful today to spend three days with the head of the Yellowstone Volcano Observatory. He is teaching a class on the super volcano, and I will be driving the class this weekend.

July 11, 2017

Over the 'Id al-Fitr holiday, 12 Aramco employees and retirees visited India. Our trip consisted of visiting the Golden Triangle of Jaipur, Agra and Delhi, with a side trip to Varanasi, once called Benares, on the Ganges River.

In Jaipur we visited the Red Fort and the World Heritage Site of Jantar Mantar Observatory. We stayed at the Shahpura House, a converted maharaja's palace.

In Agra, the highlight was a visit to the Taj Mahal, another World Heritage Site. The visit to the Taj was accompanied by huge crowds of worshippers at the mosque on the Taj grounds as this was the first day of the 'Id.



New retiree Riekke Stonehouse, right, from South Africa, joined a group of Aramcons led by retiree Lou Spencer (back right in white hat) on an 'Id al-Fitr trip to India in late June. Here, the group poses with two Indian families at the main entrance to the Taj Mahal in Agra.



Lou Spencer had this breathtaking view from the top of 8,500-foot Bunsen Peak near Yellowstone National Park in May; he normally looks up at the peak from his back deck at Yellowstone.

At Varanasi it was indeed special to witness the pilgrims bathing in the Ganges River. The huge crowds, robed monks, sadhus, cremations, songs, bells, chants and rituals performed during the day and evening were special. They say that a visit to India is an assault on the senses, and I think we all felt that after visiting the Ganges that evening.

Our last few days were spent in Delhi. A high point for me was a visit to Gandhi's cremation site, now a park, and a visit to a Sikh Temple....

Lou Spencer  
louis.spencer@yahoo.com

**NOTE:** Spencer finished his seventh season in Yellowstone this spring and continues to lead trips around the globe. At Yellowstone, the former Dhahran Schools teacher drives a bus and is the caretaker of a four-building camp. He said he plans to continue volunteering at Yellowstone "for the next few years," but did not put a limit how long he would keep leading tours.

## Musical Evokes Memories of Early Flights

June 12, 2017

There is an odd tie-in for Aramco Aviation and the musical "Come From Away" [which opened on Broadway in March], about airline passengers stranded after 9/11.

When the F.A.A. shut down American airspace on Sept. 11, 2001, thousands of passengers were diverted to an airport in Gander, Newfoundland. In the years after World War II, our father Christian J. Lund, Peter Fleury and other Aramco pilots flew employee-laden DC-4s—part of a small



Aramco acquired "The Flying Camel," a DC-4 Skymaster, in 1947 to carry passengers between New York and Dhahran—a 36-hour flight with several refueling stops.

fleet of Aramco planes—to Dhahran. But the planes couldn't fly across the Atlantic without refueling, so they stopped in Gander.

In the early years (1948 to 1951) Aramco flights originated from Riverhead, Long Island, not Idlewild (later JFK).

Planes rarely landed in Gander after the early '50s until the 37 flights that were diverted there after 9/11. And now Gander's at the center of a Tony Award-winning Broadway musical!

**Chris, Tina and Craig Lund**  
christianklund1@gmail.com

## Eyes on the 2018 Reunion

August 8, 2017

I really enjoyed reading the [latest issue] of Pleasant Days. We are interested in attending the next reunion in Austin, Texas, in the fall of 2018. If you have any fixed dates for this reunion, please let me know as we are planning a trip to Europe in the fall. Or if you have contact e-mails or phone numbers for any of the reunion hosts—David & Vicki Jessich and Bill & Judy Walker—please forward them to me.

Life goes on, pretty busy, along with gardening and charity participation in our vicinity in Vancouver.

**Paul Cunha**  
pccunha14@gmail.com

**NOTE:** An invitation to the 2018 Annuitants Reunion is on page 2.

## Naimi Book Deserves C-SPAN Review

August 9, 2017

I have just finished reading Ali Naimi's book *Out of the Desert, My Journey from Nomadic Bedouin to the Heart of Global Oil*. This book gives us the heart and soul of the Saudi/Aramco experience by [someone who] never deviated from his

Ali Naimi poses with his autobiography, tracing a long career with Aramco and as minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, published in 2016.



desire to always be ready to take on any task put before him.

I know full well that he earned every minute of his retirement. However, his book puts on him the responsibility to show a wider audience the accomplishments of his generation to build a nation showing strength and intellect for all the world to admire.

I [recommend that] Ali endeavor to spend an hour on C-SPAN with Brian Lamb, the founder of the network. He does book reviews on Sunday evening that are a joy to see. It would be nice to sell more copies of the book, but my desire is to illustrate to the world the true worth of this individual and the country of his birth.

**Bill Hayes**  
hazathel@att.net

## 'Bedouin Boy' Appreciated

August 11, 2017

The "Story of a Bedouin Boy" [Spring 2017] is very interesting and encouraging. How a Bedouin office boy of 14 years of age became the first Saudi president and then CEO of Saudi Aramco is just like a miracle.

But it proves that if a person works hard and luck favors him, he can reach his zenith and at the time of his retirement be appointed minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources to serve his country further.... His life is full of achievement.

The story "Images & Artifacts Come Home" shows a deep appreciation by retirees who are returning the treasures [they collected] to the place where they belong.

**SHAHID HUSAIN**  
755-Zaidi Society  
Meerut (U.P.)  
INDIA

## CYCLING VETERAN STARS IN GOLDEN-YEARS FILM

**A**drianus Verhoeven, who peddled from Turaif on Tapline to his hometown in Holland in 1960 and rode across America in 2012, took up a new challenge last year: cycling in a Dutch film called "Demarrage" ("Getting Away").

The bittersweet, hour-long movie "is about a group of old people trying to stay young by biking," says the former Tapline, Aramco and Aramco Overseas Company employee. "Yet the signals of old age are around the corner and ... we realize that someday we may have to go." Verhoeven turns 81 on Nov. 25.

Verhoeven's cycling group HardZat ZO (Fast Enough) was one of 32 bike clubs selected to appear in the film, "mainly because of the type of different characters we had within the group—plain good old Dutch people, hard honest guys—each one with something to contribute toward the making of the film," says the retiree.

Verhoeven's contribution? "Mainly my overall biking history," he says. His 3,730-mile journey from Saudi Arabia to Holland lasted 62 days; the 3,782-mile trip from California

to New Hampshire took 52 days. He cycles three days a week, "70-80 kilometers."

Shooting time for the film was much shorter than those marathons, but demanding nonetheless.

"All together, we had 18 film days in different areas of the Netherlands, a difficult task, yet with a lot of joy from everybody," he says. "Now we have a film we all are kind of proud of, especially all our kids. At least we leave something to remember for the grandkids [who can say]: 'That was the old man, my grandpa.'"

Ten cyclists from Verhoeven's club took part, three who had earlier stopped biking for health reasons. But viewers watching the thin men speeding on through Holland's green countryside would never notice their age or medical condition. They rode more than 1,000 kilometers for the movie.

"I'm still going strong," says Verhoeven. "It's my way of life...cycling keeps me going. It feels like freedom: early morning, nature all around you, face into the wind and no worries."



Adrianus Verhoeven, center, and fellow cycling-club member Wim Heestermans receive congratulations from Dutch sports journalist Wilfried Genee in Breda, Holland, during filming for "Demarrage" ("Getting Away")—a movie about cyclists in their golden years.

## GIRL SCOUT CALENDARS DONATED

**F**ormer *Arabian Sun* staffer Jane Grutz has donated Girl Scout calendars from 1971–77, including two featuring photos by noted amateur photographer Dorothy Miller, to the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dhahran.

"Dorothy and I put together the 1976 and 1977 calendars," she wrote. "She spent loads of her own time making finished photos in return for nothing more than the Girl Scouts' appreciation."

A story in the March 30, 1977, *Arabian Sun* showed Miller receiving an award from the scouts "for the many photos she has contributed to the annual engagement calendars." Her pictures of people, places and animals in and around Dhahran comprise a rich historical archive.

"You have to be interested and you have to know a little about what you're taking a picture of," said Miller, who shot for 26 years in the kingdom and retired a day after the story appeared.

"Picture-taking is a way of life for me," she said. "It enables me to go out and look at things and open my eyes to the world. It has made my life here much fuller."

Dorothy Miller, center, was recognized in 1977 for her contributions to the annual Girl Scout calendars by calendar editors Ieva Szentivanyi, left, and Jane Grutz, right.



## SAEEA MEMBER'S SON MARRIES



Saad Salim, the son of former Aramcon Muhammad Salim Hamid and Iffat Salim, married Iffat Javed in Karachi in late February. Muhammad Salim Hamid is the finance secretary of Saudi Aramco Ex-Employees Association (SAEEA). SAEEA officers Mohammad Abdul Mateen, Shafiq Ahmed Khan, Iqbal Ahmed Khan and Arif Qamar were among the attendees at the couple's reception in early March.

## HOUSTON RETIREES DINE IN STYLE

**F**reddie Wong, who retired as a senior project engineer in 2007 after 30 years with Aramco Services Company (ASC), may have found a new niche: restaurateur.

He's involved in the Caring Aggies Mentoring Program, or CAMP, which he established with fellow Texas A&M graduates in 2006. In April he hosted the Houston Area ASC/Aramco Retiree Group's monthly luncheon at an epicurean CAMP project.

About 30 group members enjoyed a four-course luncheon prepared and served by students at the Guthrie Center, part of Houston's Spring Branch Independent School District. Among the guests was ASC Public Affairs Director Jamal Khudair, who thanked the diners for their service to the company and told

stories about the American food items and guests that his father, an Aramco employee, brought home with him to al-Hasa.

Khudair pronounced the luncheon "delicious," joking that it reminded him of his youth.

CAMP, which draws some of its backing from ASC, helps disadvantaged students as young as third-graders. "In all, we have about 400 students in the program and about 150 volunteers," said Wong, who brought CAMP support to the Guthrie Center "restaurant class" for high-school students.

"The program is primarily focused on offering the children experiences out-



Freddie Wong, left, introduces Houston Area ASC/Retiree Group luncheon attendees to representatives of the Guthrie Center class for young restaurateurs.

side the classrooms," he said. "The most satisfying experience is to watch these kids walk across the stage at high-school graduations."

## CORLEY IS CITY'S 'KING FOR A DAY'

**L**ucedale, Miss., named Aug. 4 "James E. Corley Day," honoring the retired Aramco consulting engineer for his artistic and academic contributions to his hometown. The city named the day for Corley "to show our appreciation and honor his numerous civic projects and many years of volunteer service," read the official citation.

The ceremony took place at the Lucedale George County Public Library. That's the site of Corley's sculpture of a grandmother reading to her granddaughter—his first gift to the city

upon his return in 1995, four years after he retired.

A story in the Biloxi, Miss., *Sun Herald*, in 2004 painted a picture of Corley that still matches the man today. It called him "an accomplished artist, wood carver, boat builder and furniture maker [who has] also designed an amphitheater for Lucedale and a bridge for the city park.... He sponsors a physics project competition each year. The winner receives a monetary award, donated by Jim and [his wife] Nancy."

"My engineering work at Aramco gave me the tools to design many of my projects," Corley notes. "Each year I give a lecture to the Lucedale Middle School seventh-grade class on living in Saudi Arabia and working for Aramco. I also work with the gifted-students' class on astronomy and donated my 10-inch telescope to the class."

"I'm currently 76 years old and will probably have to give up the projects this year," he says. "But who knows—if I get another idea, I may go longer."

Jim Corley stands at right behind a Lucedale Rocky Creek Elementary School class arrayed around his sundial installation.



## SAEEA MARKS 7<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

**A** record 208 former employees and family members turned out to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the Saudi Aramco Ex-Employees Association (SAEEA) in Karachi on July 16.

"Delicious food and beautiful rainy weather" contributed to the gathering's success, SAEEA board member Iqbal Khan said.

SAEEA President Kamal A. Farooqui thanked Arif Qamar for arranging the program.

As usual, meeting "old buddies" was a highlight of the get-together, Khan said. On a sadder note, he said that the following SAEEA members had recently died: Ateequrrahman Khan, Habib Nabi Khan, Qaiser Majid Khan, Nizamuddin Khan, Zaheer Baig, Mohammad Akhtar and Syed Mahmood Ali. Abdul Razzak Mansoor and Ghulam Abbasi each lost his wife.

SAEEA members, along with children and grandchildren, turned out in record numbers for the group's seventh anniversary in July.



# AFGHANISTAN:

## REMEMBRANCE OF A FASCINATING PAST

Written and photographed by Robert Hill



When I joined Aramco's Corporate Planning organization in Dhahran with my family in 1987, we weren't really new to the region. My wife Gerarda and I had lived in Iran and Afghanistan with our sons Robert and James in the '70s—and we looked forward to exploring new vistas in Saudi Arabia with great anticipation.

My fascination for the region took root early: reading *One Thousand and One Nights* as a youngster, moving on with the passage of time in my imagination to flying carpets and belly dancing, and finally earning a Ph.D. in Near Eastern studies and demography at Princeton. I consulted with the U.N. Development Program in Tehran in the early '70s, accompanied by Gerarda. During this time, I wrote eight articles about Arab and Persian poets and philosophers for McGraw Hill's *Encyclopedia of World Biography*.

We moved to Kabul with our young son Robert in 1973 so I could join a U.S.

Agency for International Development (USAID) team helping the Afghan Government conduct its first population census. We surveyed nomadic groups, villages and towns across the country to establish a national age and sex estimate.

All those experiences, plus travel elsewhere in the area, helped me imagine more than ever what the region



*Top: A Pashtun woman does chores in an encampment consisting of straw yurt dwellings, likely in the Hazarajat region in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The Pashtuns are Afghanistan's predominant ethnic group. Above: The author holds his son Rob, age two, on a trip through the Kabul Gorge and the Khyber Pass in 1974.*



*Above left: The author ventured deep into Nuristan Province in eastern Afghanistan in 1973 to see if it would be safe to take a national census of nomads there, given the region's unsettled conditions. Above right: Turkmens carry deep-red carpets woven in their homes to the weekly *suq* in Aqcha in the country's north. Right: This treacherous mountain pass in Badakhshan Province in the far northeast was normally traversable only by horse, donkey or on foot.*

had been like in centuries past.

Iran was a high-plateau, dry-desert country with a well-documented civilization. Afghanistan, on the other hand, was a country with lush river valleys, stark mountains and a large, colorful nomadic population that seemingly had not changed for centuries, with *suqs* where visitors could walk, almost magically, into the past. It was an extraordinarily exciting and beautiful place.

The two years we lived in Kabul preceded the Russian invasion in 1979 and the ensuing rise of the Taliban, who eventually gave sanctuary to al-Qaeda. Life was much simpler and more peaceful in those days.

Afghanistan was dirt poor in the early '70s, ranked alongside Yemen as the world's lowest-income nation, according to the United Nations. Still, my family and I found an inviting and engaging—if at times nerve-jangling—environment there. The people were caring toward travelers and visitors, especially young families. (Robert was a year old when we arrived in Kabul and James was born there in 1974.)

Learning about Afghanistan, past and present, was one of the pleasures of my USAID assignment. I had a direct view into the region's heritage from the Ministry of Planning.

There, for several seasons, I watched through my office window as long camel caravans loped past, almost close enough to touch. In the late spring they came up from the Tribal Areas in Pakistan through the famed Khyber Pass and the stupendous Kabul Gorge on the way to summer pastures in the high, snow-covered Hindu Kush

mountains—a climb of some 9,000 feet. In the fall they wound their way back down.

The joke was never to have camel meat for your kebab, because it would be too tough to chew.

My census work put me in direct touch with one of the country's most colorful demographic groups—its nomads. Most Afghan men were armed, especially in the countryside, mainly for personal protection.

So we were surprised on July 16, 1973, when we were awakened by sustained gunfire around midnight. I first thought robbers—with machine-guns!—were afoot and wondered what to do. The idea of fleeing to our basement with my young family was not appealing. Spiders, rats and scorpions hiding down there periodically found ways to escape up into our house and yard. We stayed put.

Not until the next morning did we discover that King





Mohammad Zahir Shah had been overthrown by his cousin Daoud Khan. The coup was announced at 6 a.m. by a screaming Russian MIG flying low over the city, but we didn't officially find out about it until later in the day on the BBC. At that time, there was no television in Afghanistan, no newspaper and the national radio only broadcast for two hours each night. It played martial music.

We spent the next three days hiding

in our house, awaiting word from the government that it was safe to emerge. Then, when a couple of coworkers and I were being driven back to work, nervous soldiers on patrol shot up the front end of our truck. We walked home.

Much later the U.S. Embassy said (and I paraphrase): "We should have warned the foreign community beforehand and organized an escape caravan of cars down through the Kabul Gorge and Khyber

Pass." Of course, whole British armies had been wiped out doing precisely that in 1842 and 1880, so I'm glad we did not attempt that harrowing escape route!

I continued to assist with the census after the coup, spending quite a bit of time outside of Kabul interacting with nomads. I traveled on primitive roads, sometimes on horseback, to nearly all the provinces. In fact, that was one of the most intriguing parts of my work, despite some close calls

*Above: Turkmen near Maimana in northern Afghanistan gather around a top contender in a cock fight, eager to pick the winning entry. Below left: The Aqcha suq offered horse accoutrements, as well as matches from the Soviet Union; dyes, glue and L&M cigarettes from the West; and rock salt, lye soap and a variety of grains. Right: A tradesman sells valuable tools such as saws, scythes, hammers and tongs fashioned from hubcaps, steel drums and car parts. Some fabricators even made their own guns.*



with trigger-happy men. Thank goodness, cool heads always prevailed.

The nomads' primary occupation was sheep and goat herding, supplemented by trading, licit or otherwise. While the Chinese engaged in trading with the Kirghiz high up on the Wakhan Corridor northeast of Kabul, the Russians, British, Pakistanis and Americans worked to gain influence through development projects.

The Soviet Union built the country's first paved national road (on which its tanks would later invade). The United States countered with a hydroelectric dam on a major river in Helmand Province. In the background, deep in the mountainous areas like Nuristan on the Pakistan border in the east, low-grade tribal warfare percolated.

Afghans believed firmly in giving shelter and food to travelers. There were times during my travels around the country when the very best our Afghan hosts could offer us was a dirt floor for sleeping and small kebabs of solid fat from their famous Afghan fat-tailed sheep, along with bread and tea. On such occasions, I just ate the bread and drank the tea.

Once when our four-man team wound up in a village after traveling deep into the mountains for about five days on a month-long trip across the middle of the country, over practically nonexistent roads between snow-capped peaks, the place we found to stay served only one dish: a huge bowl of soup. It consisted of a broth of boiled, congealing sheep's fat—no meat.

There were no spoons in the village. No matter. Following our hosts, we broke the rustic Afghan bread into pieces, dropped them in the soup to soak and then grabbed a soggy chunk all with our right hand and ate it. It was filling.

Despite our peaceful intentions, tribesmen sometimes shot at us to defend their women and flocks as we approached to take the census. I always traveled with just two other Afghans from the Ministry of Planning and an all-purpose driver.

A normal interview would take about 30 minutes, depending on the preliminary formalities to gain our subjects' confidence. We would ask interviewees about all the members of the household or tribe: their age, sex,



*Top: The Hill family—Robert, Gerarda and son Rob—paused to have their photo taken in July 1973 at the Soviet-built Salang Tunnel running more than two miles under snow-capped Hindu Kush peaks. Above: Robert, James, Gerarda and Rob Hill posed for this photo in Dhahran in 1993.*

education, occupation, language affiliation and place of birth, if they knew it.

One of the Afghans who spoke the pertinent language—Dari (Farsi), Pashto, Uzbek or Turkish (Turkoman)—conducted the interview. Sometimes, however, we didn't get that far.

On one occasion, following a brief over-the-head exchange of gunfire with an encampment of suspicious tribesmen deep in the countryside, the nomads invited us into their black, goat-hair tents for tea and the interview. We each had proven our good intentions: they by defending what was most precious to them; we by showing that our interview was important to their government.

On another trip, riding in a single vehicle, days away from any town, we stumbled upon a group of 30 to 40 men. We saw their encampment deep in a valley as we came over a high mountain pass. Had we known the camp's makeup, we might have turned around, but this was the only "road" through these high passes and

valleys, so we bumped our way down, through gullies and dry streambeds. We had a job to do.

When we finally arrived we discovered the camp had no women and no children. The tents were new canvas ones, not the traditional black tents. The men had none of the usual one-humped dromedary camels nor any flocks of sheep or goats, only magnificent horses and a few huge double-humped Bactrian camels for transporting heavy loads. We could only guess what they were carrying....

The men were armed with British rifles from the late 1800s and wearing bandoliers of bullets. Oh my. We decided not to ask any census questions, especially the one about occupation.

Instead, we congratulated them on their powerful horses and fine rifles, then quickly pulled out our "state-of-the-art" Polaroid camera, making gifts of pictures that we took of them until we ran out of film. They loved it! Everyone in our small party breathed a sigh of relief.

After about an hour of these formalities, we excused ourselves and proceeded quickly on our way. In this case, certainly, some imaginative discretion proved the better part of valor.

After Afghanistan, I went on to work for Gulf Oil and Chevron for 13 years as an economist presenting oil outlooks to company executives and oil ministers around the world, among other duties. My economic schooling and Middle East experience served me well. These "adventures," of course, were nothing to compare with what my family and I had already experienced.

Accepting a job in planning at Aramco, after working in the hallways of power in major oil firms, seemed a natural fit in many ways. My family and I had been exposed to the hard facts of this part of the world early on. Our experiences made us realize that people all over want and need the same basic things: security and the chance to better their lives. Aramco offered new—albeit safer—opportunities to achieve that in a region we loved. If we could further that effort, all the better for everyone concerned.

**NOTE:** Robert and Gerarda Hill lived in Dhahran for 17 years. Their sons Robert and James graduated from the Dhahran Schools in 1988 and 1990, respectively. During her last decade in Dhahran, Gerarda worked at the Community Heritage Gallery, where she served as senior docent. The Hills retired to Columbia, Mo., in 2004, and Gerarda died in 2014. Bob lives there today.

# HURRICANES

## Wreak Havoc, Bring Out Best, Among Aramcons

By ARTHUR CLARK

When Hurricane Harvey struck Texas and Louisiana in late August, and Hurricane Irma tore through the Caribbean and Florida in early September, a number of retirees had to flee their homes. Other, more fortunate, former Aramcons volunteered to help neighbors in need. One Brat—Dean Barnes of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands—weathered Irma only to face her sister Maria two weeks later.

Here are a few of their stories.

### Jane and Bob Grutz

“What can I tell you about Harvey? It didn’t start out badly,” Jane Grutz wrote Sept. 11 from Alexandria, Va., where she’d evacuated from Houston with her husband Bob. Although Harvey made landfall well south of Houston on Friday, Aug. 25,

Above: Bob and Jane Grutz found this vista at entrance to their subdivision in West Houston, which was flooded with water released from two huge reservoirs in the wake of record rainfall from Hurricane Harvey in late August. The storm dumped more than 50 inches of rain in the Houston area, overwhelming old flood-pool defenses.

there was little impact until Saturday night “when we were awakened by the sound of sheets of rain pelted against the windows.

“We learned later that some people tried to get their cars out of their garages at that time (one person drowned in his car, we were told), but we waited until the morning when we discovered five or six inches of rain on our garage floor.”

That would have been bad news any time, but a home-improvement store had just delivered special-order patio doors,

along with a pile of timber for the door-frames, “all sitting on the garage floor. The doors were far too heavy for Bob and



Bob Grutz, left, shares a seat in a catfishing boat helmed by volunteer L.J. Planer of Clarksville, Tenn., one of many volunteers hauled their boats to Houston and nearby cities and towns to provide aid after Hurricane Harvey.

me to manage, but our neighbor came to Bob’s aid and together they managed to lift them off the floor onto a slightly higher shelf.

“The next task was to lift the lumber off



the floor and move it into the house, which Bob and I did together, one very long stick at a time—wading through the water, up the steps of the garage to the patio and through the sliding glass doors into the living room.”

The power went off the next morning. “For the next few days we would be without AC, a working stove, a working refrigerator, not to mention radio, the Internet or television, nor, it turned out, even a working telephone.

“Fortunately, we had a small, battery-operated radio. To conserve the battery, we turned the radio on for a short time once every hour in an attempt to discover how long the rain would continue.”

Rain poured down Sunday and Monday. “Instead of cars on the road in front of our house, we began to see boats. Helicopters hovered over our neighborhood, attempting

bands. “We hurried downstairs, picked up the required supplies and, arrayed in our nightclothes, waded through the garage waters where, with the aid of our small flashlight, we managed to fit the plastic bags onto the tailpipes quite tightly,” Jane said.

But there were no plastic bags big enough to cover the appliances in the garage: a washer and dryer and an almost new water heater. “All were located on shelf a few inches higher than the garage floor,” she wrote. “But the water was now creeping up the sides of each of them and the word ‘write-off’ was beginning to enter our vocabulary.”

On Tuesday morning the rain slowed and the water in the garage began to subside. They began moving furniture back downstairs. Then, just after Jane had settled down for a nap, “Bob suddenly came rushing up the stairs,

saying, ‘We have to get out. The Addicks Reservoir dam has broken and everything will be flooded. (In fact, they later found out, the Corps of Engineers had opened the reservoir to release high water, deluging many homes.)

“I grabbed a handbag and my sandals and we boarded a tiny inflatable police boat, which took us to a slightly larger airboat where we were soon joined by our next-door neighbors and their two dogs.

“Our next stop was at the landing stage

a few streets away where volunteers were waiting to help us find shelter. We had no idea where we would go when a young couple approached us and asked if we would like to stay with them. We could hardly believe how lucky we were.

“For the next two days we sat in their lovely home, for the most part watching the story of the Houston flood unfold on their large-screen TV. If we thought we had difficulties, we soon began to see that others were far worse off. Many had lost their homes, untold numbers had lost their cars and a few had even lost their lives.”

Two nights later they moved to a hotel. Their daughter Heidi Grutz Karsten and grandson Erik arrived from Virginia the next evening “driving a hired Jeep Cherokee (to brave the waters surrounding our house) packed with loads of water and



When Jane and Bob Grutz made their way to their Woodlake Forest subdivision home via Gessner Rd.—normally a two-lane with trees in the median—“the strong current nearly pulled the boat down the wrong street,” Jane reported.

**“We had no idea where we would go when a young couple approached us and asked if we would like to stay with them. We could hardly believe how lucky we were.”**

to assess the situation. And the situation was beginning to look very bad indeed.

“To save what we could, we began to move the rugs and smaller furniture from the lower floor of our house to the upper floor. Small tables, side chairs, lamps and vases all went up, with each additional piece striving to find space on our ever-more-crowded bedroom floors. Our house took on the appearance of a storage shed.

“Meanwhile, the water kept rising. Our radio reports gave occasional estimates of how many inches would fall in the ensuing hours: two inches, three inches and, in at least one instance, five inches.”

Bob made frequent visits to the garage to see how many inches of water it would take to enter the tail pipes of the couple’s Hondas. “He somehow managed to jack both cars up as high as he could, but the difference between flooded cars and saved cars was beginning to look hairline thin,” Jane said.

After going to bed Sunday night, they came up with a plan to save the cars by placing heavy-duty plastic bags over the tailpipes and securing them with rubber

Rain, not wind, was Hurricane Harvey’s calling card in Houston. Water quickly filled streets along the city’s bayous, finally overtopping curbs and lawns and flooding cars and homes.





The joke's on the pedestrian: No one took this sign seriously after Hurricane Harvey dumped four feet or more of water over parts of Houston.

homes have suffered badly from the flood, even in our own neighborhood."

The couple returned to Houston on Sept. 14, "and things have been really wild ever since," Jane wrote a few days later. "We lost both cars and the dryer, have lots of heavy mold

on the garage walls and suffered a big stain on our living room carpet. Other than that, everything is fine."

## Hank Barracano

Hank Barracano was evacuated by boat when floodwaters reached his assisted-living facility in Spring, just northwest of Houston, the night of Aug. 27.

"We were told we had 15 minutes to pack a bag," he said in a phone call a month later from Lewiston, Texas, about 300 miles north of Houston, where he and around 90 facility occupants wound up. They had to wade through water at least a foot deep to get to the boats.

The street where they lived had turned into "a raging torrent, like the Mississippi River," said Barracano, who is 91. "It was quite an adventure for 80- to 90-year-olds."

Soon after reaching higher ground, he and his companions were taken by van to a nearby town "where we slept on couches and chairs," he said. The next day the corporation that owns their facility transported the evacuees to another property in Lewiston.

"The evacuation itself was traumatic, but people up here are nice," Barracano said. "The food is even better than in

Houston, but we hope to go home soon."

"Things could have been much worse," he said. His apartment, on the fourth floor of the facility in Spring, was not damaged, but the storm ruined the ground floor.

A little over a week after he'd evacuated Houston, another storm was on Barracano's



Hank Barracano

mind: His daughter Linda (RT68) of Sarasota, Fla., was in the path of Hurricane Irma, but it only suffered a glancing blow from the storm. "She did OK," Barracano said.

## Tonie and Vijay Maheshwari

Retirees Tonie and Vijay Maheshwari did not suffer any hurricane damage, but they were alarmed.

"On the morning of Aug. 27, we could not leave our home as the streets around us were flooded. We were like an island," Tonie said.

"We were blessed that water did not come into our home and we had power. We saw pictures of flooded areas and people stranded and getting rescued from their homes and

other supplies."

The following day they drove back to their neighborhood, "where we were finally allowed to board the flat-bottomed fishing boat of L.J. Planer of Tennessee, a volunteer who took us within a block of our house.

"We waded through the relatively shallow waters for the rest of the way, not knowing what to expect. But we were lucky. The area in front of our house was relatively dry and the house itself had not been flooded.

"No water was left in the garage, but the floor was covered with mud and the plastic bags that had covered the tailpipes of our cars were wet."

The Honda Fit looked fit, but their Honda Accord appeared to be less fortunate.

They grabbed a couple of changes of clothes, some credit cards and other documents (they had left their house with just one credit card and only the clothes on their backs) and waded back to the boat, "relieved that the house was intact, and perhaps even a car or two," Jane said.

"The supplies our daughter had brought were still in the Jeep and we moved them to Mr. Planer's SUV for those who might need them. From what we had seen, it appeared there were many whose

Tonie and Vijay Maheshwari pitched in to help after viewing Hurricane Harvey's devastation. From left, Tonie stands with Sue Bhavsar center and Ila Patel in front the Bhavsar family's home in West Houston, its yard and those of neighboring homes filled with flood debris.





Mirroring the painting "American Gothic," Dean Barnes (DH76) and his partner Carol Bareuther pose on the debris-clogged road in front of their home in the St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, after weathering two hurricanes—Irma and Maria—in the space of two weeks in September.

out of a board with your bare hand, but if you bend the nail over a bit and worry (good word that) the nail back and forth, eventually it will come out."

"I will be on intermittently to preserve battery and backup power," he wrote Sept. 6, the day the storm struck. "We are well so stay calm my friends." Later that day: "A moment of worry here, but roof is still on."

Then, on Sept 11, he returned to Facebook: "This is the first time I have been able to get on since Irma's passing. As we used to say, what a rush. We are OK, doggies too."

"We got flooded from blown rain and the gutters were ripped off, but the roof held. It was a long scary day and night. Most of the roads are one way with power lines blocking the other half with branches making tunnels to go under. Our hospital is shutting down and they have or are evacuating the patients...."

"Thanks to those who made helpful and thoughtful comments at the beginning of the storm. I draw strength from my family, my tribe and my fb peeps."

Later, Barnes wrote that he and Carol didn't know what to expect when they opened the front door and stepped out the morning after the storm. "We hugged each other, glad to have survived."

Then, on Sept. 19, word came that Hurricane Maria was bearing down on the Virgin Islands. A Facebook friend wrote Sept. 20 that she'd received word that Barnes's "roof had held through the second storm" and that he and Carol were safe.

"Yippee!" she posted.

## Dean Barnes

Dean Barnes (DH67), an attorney with the U.S. Virgin Islands Dept. of Justice, found himself and his longtime partner Carol Bareuther in Hurricane Irma's crosshairs early in September. They had experienced two major hurricanes already, so knew what to expect.

"For a while, Irma looked like she was going to definitely go to the north of us," Barnes posted on Facebook on Sept. 2. "Now the track has shifted a bit to the west which means closer."

He did the usual storm chores, filling gas cylinders for the barbecue, storing water and making sure he had extra dog food on hand. "Charged camera batteries, checked the batteries in my Grundig shortwave world-band receiver, checked home lanterns and flashlights, the usual prep. stuff. First-aid kits are fine....," he posted.

On Sept. 4 he said he'd completed hurricane preparations, but the next day he wrote, "Even before the storm has arrived, I feel humbled and a bit worried that my house will stand up to Category 5 winds. With a hurricane, it's not just the intensity, but the duration of the storm. You can't pull a nail

vehicles. The rescuers were angels....

"It was unfortunate that homes of people living near the Barker and Addicks reservoirs were flooded and had to be evacuated. Friends who had just called to check on us had their homes flooded when water was released from the dams due to the extreme rainfall."

Moved by what they'd seen, the Maheshwaris volunteered to help at a stadium that had been turned into shelter for flooded-out residents.

"We were assigned to receive donations from vehicle after vehicle of people bringing items that had been requested—water, baby items, pet food, towels, toiletries—and from businesses that sent donations by the truckloads."

"We were exhausted after a week or so of helping people affected by Harvey.... We want to help but we are not as strong or in good shape as we once were when we were younger. This is to say that our minds want to help but our bodies don't cooperate!"

They were impressed by everyone who pitched in.

"Rescuers came from all over Texas and other states," Tonie said. "Of special note was the Cajun Navy, volunteers from Louisiana who came in their high-clearance trucks and their boats to help Texans."

If Hurricane Harvey had a silver lining, it was the response of citizens to the disaster.

"The people's generosity and the way they helped each other was amazing," Vijay said. "This gives me a measure of hope for America and our humanity."

This view of downed power lines and trees stripped of their foliage near St. Thomas, capped by a rainbow, offer a grim look back and a brighter one ahead in the wakes of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.





# BRAT'S PHOTOBOOK

## DEPICTS DHAHRAN

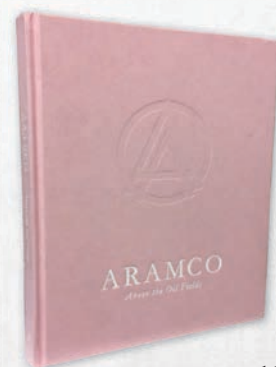
### 'Momentous and Ordinary All at Once'

by JANE WALDRON GRUTZ

Ayesha Malik's handsome new book of photographs, *ARAMCO: Above the Oil Fields*, portrays the community that many of us once called home. Rather than simply showing what Dhahran looks like, however, it documents what it *feels* like to live there.

**M**alik, 28, should know. She was born in the Dhahran Health Center and lived in the community until 2011, when her father Munsoor Malik retired from the Industrial Security Dept. and took a new job in Riyadh.

If Malik's childhood differed from that of any other Brat it might have been because she spent more time riding around town on her bike and snapping pictures than her contemporaries. Her mom Rubina took a lot of pictures, too, as did her dad, and a number of them appear in Malik's book. But she shot



most of the photographs (there are more than 150) between 2011 and 2016.

*ARAMCO: Above the Oil Fields* is not

Malik's first pictorial essay of Dhahran. The initial one grew out of her photographic studies at Parsons School of Design in New York, where she enrolled in 2006.

It was then that she began to realize how different Dhahran was from any other

*Opposite, far left: "Father and son on a weekend walk." Left: "A mother waves goodbye to her daughter as she departs for Dhahran Elementary School at 7 a.m."*

community she knew. "I missed it, and I just couldn't let go," Malik remembers.

When the time came to write her senior thesis, she decided to put together a collection of photographs depicting different aspects of Dhahran to show what made the place so special to her. *ARAMCO: Above the Oil Fields*, published with an attractive pink linen binding, expands greatly on her thesis.

The book benefited from Malik's career as a professional photographer, which she launched after graduating from Parsons 2012. Her work gained notice and in 2016 Daylight Books, a nonprofit publisher of art and photo titles, asked her if she would like to do a book about where she'd grown up.

Malik didn't hesitate. She revisited her thesis and decided to give it a personal touch.

She included pictures of her friends, her family, her acquaintances and sometimes people she met on the street, "just as you would if you lived there," she explains. She also included photos of company cars and company buses, of street scenes and soccer games, and even of oil-well markers and tankage.

To make the book even more personal, and at the same time more universal, Malik bound in everyday items such as clippings from *The Arabian Sun*, a map from the Dhahran telephone book and a delightful fan letter written by her then-11-year-old sister Sara to Leonardo DiCaprio (which, for lack of a correct address, was returned).

Many of the photographer's captions are simple, as if written for insiders: *From top: "Dhahran Commissary"; "Hari on Third Street"; and "Skateboarders at the skate park."*





Above left: Late afternoon light enhanced the colors of the photographer's "Moving box full of my childhood memories." Right: "Latifa with her daughter, Juriyah, before a soccer game."

All the image collating and collecting took place at her parents' home in Riyadh, which Malik made her base for a series of photographic excursions to Dhahran.

Sometimes she traveled by plane, other times by car, and on more than one occasion she took her bicycle with her to replicate her childhood days of peddling around town, taking pictures of everything.

The book, published in August, involved seven visits to Dhahran.

Although *ARAMCO: Above the Oil Fields* is now in print, Malik's travels to Saudi Arabia are by no means over. "Sometimes I spend two months there, sometimes three or four months," she says. "It is such a big country and there's so much there. It's fantastic."

Maris Schwartz Taylor of the *New York Times* used a similar term in her review of the book, writing: "Ayesha Malik reveals a window to a world that

could be a fairytale—dreamt up by a utopian diplomat or expat urban designer. But...this is her reality and a true Saudi experience. By turning the lens on her own experience, Malik captures genuine moments that almost feel banal—until some small detail reminds you of where you are in the world."

Or, as Malik writes in her book: "Saudi Arabia, particularly Dhahran, is home, momentous and ordinary all at once."

Malik portrayed workers of many nationalities, in western and eastern dress. Below left: "Suha after work in the commissary parking lot." Right: "Mr. Embleton in his office, Public Relations."





## Secret to Successful Kids' Books:

# 'Humor, Imagination, Message'

BY JANE WALDRON GRUTZ

Former Aramcon Mary Marchi has a definite philosophy when it comes to children's books: "They should have humor. They should have a message." And most important of all, "They should spark youngsters' imaginations."

Marchi might be referring to books like *The Golden Pumpkin Crown*, about a young deer who, thanks to his pumpkin crown, accidentally saves his friends from a scary creature, or *Here Comes the Bus*, a rhyming tale for tots. She wrote both those books, and six more besides, after retiring from a 40-year career as a teacher and school administrator in 2005.

For Marchi, reading to children had been fun. Writing for them would prove even better. In 2012 Marchi self-published *The Web in the Halo*. Like the books that followed, it showcased her knack for turning everyday events into stories of high adventure, always with happy endings.

For Marchi, simply watching what's happening around her—or to her—generates an idea.

The plot for *The Golden Pumpkin Crown* popped into her head when she saw deer munching discarded Halloween pumpkins outside her family's vacation cabin. Her daughters' reaction to her knitting skills (or lack thereof) inspired *Mrs. Littlebit Learns to Knit*. And when she spotted a school bus filled with wide-eyed children, she knew she had to write about the excitement of a youngster's first bus ride in *Here Comes the Bus*.

Marchi has a lot of experience with small children. When her husband Jack joined the Aramco Schools as a psychologist in 1972, their daughter Maria was six and baby Gina was 18 months old. Life in Dhahran prompted many story ideas, but with two little girls to care for most of Marchi's writing was confined to letters home.

Nor was there much time to write after the family returned to California in 1975 and Marchi, who formerly taught social science on a PBS TV channel, began to teach first grade in Carmel and learned the importance of reading aloud to children.

"Good listeners become good readers. You have to hear the words first," she says.

Marchi geared her first books to children ages four to eight. They proved so

popular that readers asked her if she had books for older children, too. And so began the *Littlebits* series, about a family not unlike her own whose members solve their day-to-day problems in all sorts of inventive ways.

After *The Littlebits*, Marchi wrote *Mrs. Littlebit Learns to Knit* and *Mr. Littlebit Fixed It*. These books are designed for beginning readers and, like her earlier titles, are filled with her own colorful illustrations.

When it comes to publishing, however, Marchi relies on The Book Patch, which prints her books on demand.

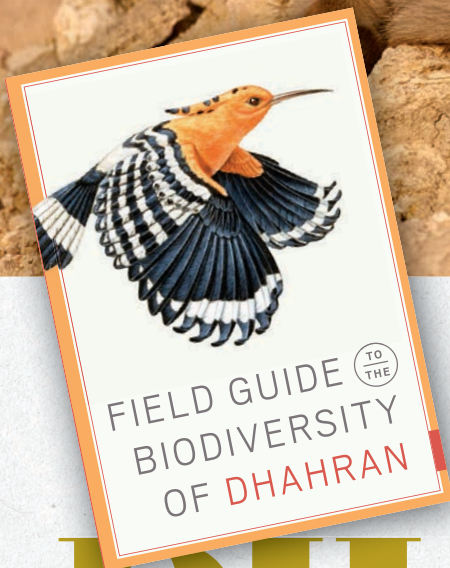
Marchi is now turning her attention to adults with *Through the Main Gate*, a compilation of letters that she and her husband wrote home when they were living in Dhahran.

She doesn't expect the book to be a bestseller, but hopes it will evoke memories of a special time in her family members' lives, and those of others who lived in Saudi Arabia in the '70s, when sand dunes bordered the Dhahran fence and a trip to al-Khobar was a great adventure.

Information about her titles is available at [www.mvmbooks.weebly.com](http://www.mvmbooks.weebly.com).

These three books by Mary Marchi, like her other five children's titles, aim to stimulate youngsters' imaginations. The former Aramcon began writing after a 40-year career in teaching and school administration.





# NEW BOOK ZEROES IN *on 'Biodiversity of* DHAHRAN'

By JAMES P. MANDAVILLE

Dhahran residents and visitors interested in natural history need no longer pursue the names of wild plants and birds and other animals in obscure textbooks and journals. Saudi Aramco's own Environmental Protection Dept. (EPD) has now provided them with a single volume that does it all, with marvelous illustrations and straight talk. It is a multi-authored work, but the EPD's Chris Boland was the chief guide to the compilation of the 364-page *Field Guide to the Biodiversity of Dhahran*, published this year.

This is not, mercifully, another oversized coffee-table decoration. Rather, it's a handy volume that can be carried to the field. It is a bit hefty, at nearly two and a half pounds in hardback, a consequence of its being printed entirely on art paper. But that has a

worthy purpose, providing the finest definition for hundreds of color photographs that illustrate all the organisms described.

The late Irene Linning leads off with a section that describes and illustrates the plants and fungi of Dhahran. She was

able to see her work in final form, but only shortly before she lost her life after a tragic accident.

This is not a book about the cultivated plants of Dhahran; Linning's study area was mainly inside the perimeter fence

The introduction to the hardcover edition of *Field Guide to the Biodiversity of Dhahran*, published this year for Dhahran residents and employees, features an Arabian red fox resting in the *jabals* on Peninsula Blvd., photographed by Phil Roberts.

but centered on the natural peripheral areas of limestone *jabals*, or hills, on the northern side of town. It's a zone that in a sense is more "natural" than areas outside the fence since it has been protected from grazing by camels, sheep and goats for some 70 years.

Linning's excellent photos tell her story well, and she adds useful information about how to differentiate among plants that may look somewhat alike, adding these details in nontechnical terms. Linning and her sometimes-collaborating husband Rienk Lakeman contributed one of the most striking photos in the book: a striped hawkmoth hovering in mid-air and sipping nectar from the flowers of *Silene villosa* (desert campion) after sunset.

Linning is also the only author to discuss the climate and topography of Dhahran, subjects that might have deserved an introductory section for the book overall. The backgrounds of some of her photos give the only views of the

Dhahran landscape.

She provides the important numbers for the great variation of rainfall from year to year: from five millimeters (mm), or just 0.2 inches, to over 250 mm. Even so, there is no mention of Dhahran's long-term mean annual rainfall, which was calculated in 2010 from 42 years of records as only 77 mm, or three inches.

The book's next section, on reptiles, frogs and fish, deals first with turtles. Two species of turtles have managed to find their way into Dhahran's manmade ponds.

It moves on to lizards, including the big, spiny-tailed lizard known as the *dhub* (but requiring two "b's" in the transliteration of the Arabic). This vegetarian is considered edible by the Bedouins, and I have tried it and found its roasted tail tasting rather like lamb.

Among the smaller lizards described are the yellow-bellied house gecko sometimes seen walking on house walls and even ceilings, and the sandfish, a skink that can "swim" under sand almost like a fish in water.

Snakes, alas, are not mentioned in the book, which tends not to record anything for which the authors had no photos.

Dhahran, in fact, is host to at least four or five different snakes, including the sand viper, *Cerastes*, found mainly in the desert periphery.

The section on birds is an exciting collection of professional-class photos, of which Jem Babbington was a major contributor (as he was for the section on insects). Among the birds is the *bud-bud*, or hoopoe, that I remember sometimes gracing the water sprinklers of Dhahran and Najmah lawns. The hoopoe is also the subject of a most fitting illustration on the dust cover of the book, a detailed painting by Richard Orr.

The final part of the book deals with the few wild mammals found in the Dhahran area. A close-up of an Arabian red fox at rest, shot by Phil Roberts, provides a particularly appealing opening page. It is followed by photos of the desert hedgehog, a bat (Kuhl's pipistrelle) and the mouse-like Sundervall's jird.

In the back of the book the reader will find a checklist of all the birds, a glossary explaining the few technical terms used in the volume, and a well-designed index including both scientific and common plant and animal names.



Clockwise from top left: The diminutive Blue-cheeked Bee-eater passes through Dhahran as it migrates from eastern Africa to breeding grounds in western Asia; *Erodium laciniatum* (cut-leaved cranesbill) is one of the earliest annuals to sprout, in January; the Eastern Imperial Eagle, standing nearly three feet tall, is a rare autumn visitor to Dhahran and listed as vulnerable to global extinction; the Pied Kingfisher, also rare, has only been recorded at Lake Lanhardt in Dhahran Hills.

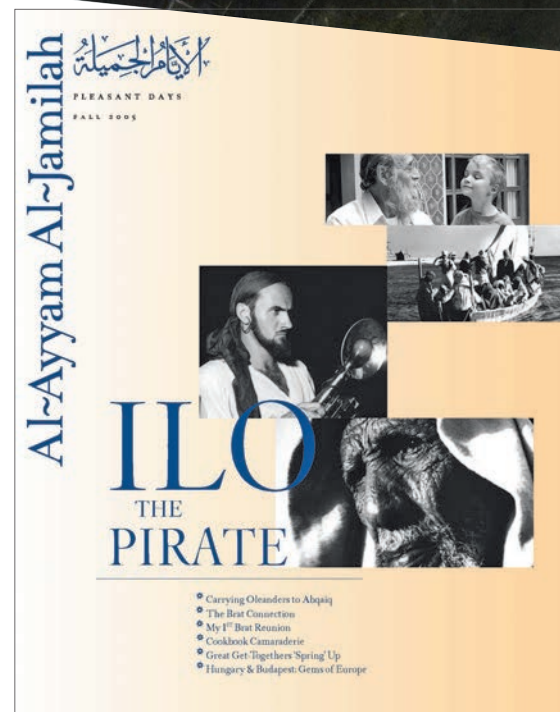
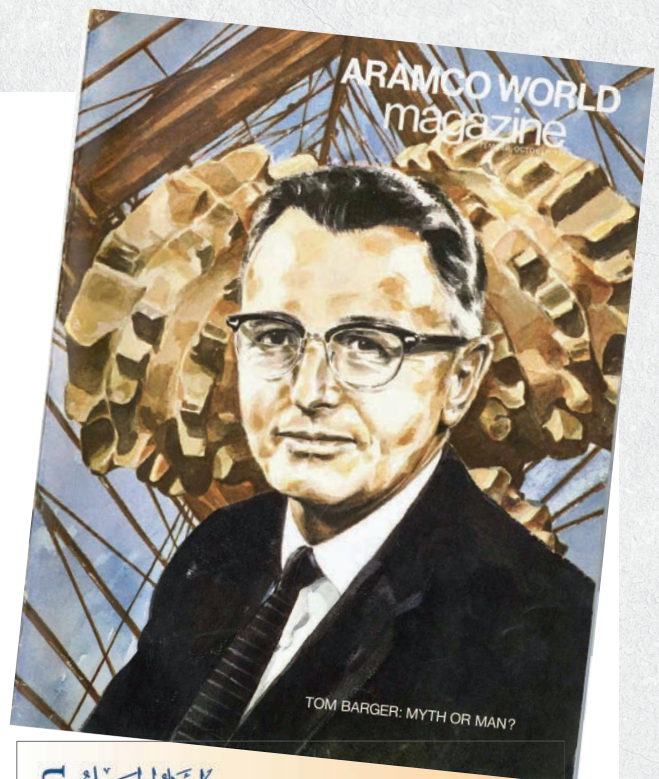


# KEY IMAGE

## COLLECTIONS Donated TO TOP INSTITUTIONS

By ARTHUR CLARK

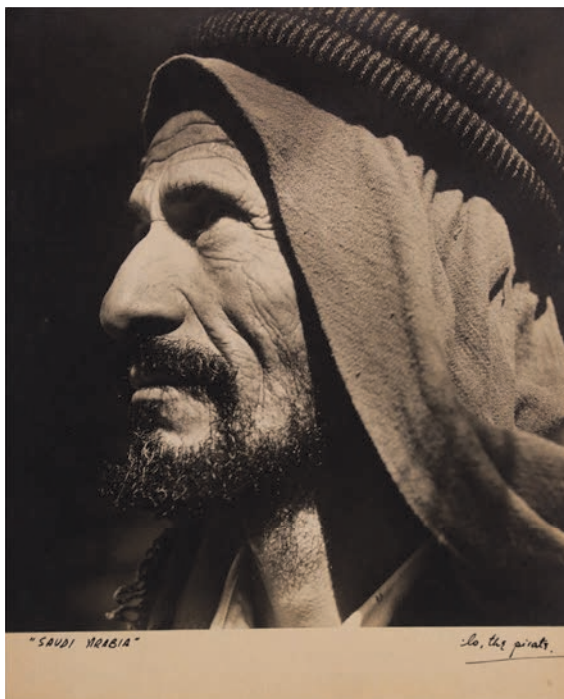
**A WEALTH OF IMAGES OF ARAMCO AND SAUDI ARABIA HAVE BEEN DONATED TO WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTIONS BY THE FAMILIES OF THOMAS C. BARGER, A PIONEER OF OIL EXPLORATION IN THE KINGDOM WHO BECAME ARAMCO PRESIDENT AND CEO, AND ILO BATTIGELLI, AN ITALIAN FROM ERITREA WHO WORKED AT THE RAS TANURA REFINERY PROJECT FROM THE MID-‘40S TO THE EARLY ‘50S AND SHOT ICONIC PICTURES UNDER THE NAME “ILO THE PIRATE.”**



Aramcos Tom Barger and Ilo Battigelli both got cover stories in company publications: Barger in *Aramco World* when he retired in 1969 after a 32-year career, and Battigelli in *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* in 2005, when he was 83. Some 500 photos Barger shot or collected during his career, and the photos Battigelli took as “Ilo the Pirate” during his time with the company from 1946–54 were recently donated by their families to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, respectively.

This summer Barger’s son Tim turned over the T.C. Barger Collection of photos, films and papers to the Lauinger Library at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. The materials will complement the library’s “good selection of collections from Aramco employees including Bill Mulligan, Joe McMahon and Dorothy Miller,” he said, and “always be available to researchers now and in the future.”

He also provided a copy of the photographs taken and collected by his father to Saudi Aramco.



These photos from the T.C. Barger Collection (top) and the Ilo Battigelli archive (bottom) depict similar subjects. *Top left and right:* Al-Murra Bedouin draw water from a well at Khor al-Mijud in the Rub' al-Khali in 1938; a Bedouin at Badanah, a pump-station town on the Trans-Arabian Pipe Line in the northeastern corner of Saudi Arabia in 1951. *Bottom:* "Noon Time" at an oasis in eastern Saudi Arabia and "Saudi Arabia," showing a Bedouin in the same area. Battigelli worked at the Ras Tanura Refinery from 1946 to 1954.

"Aramco was more than just an oil company," Barger said. "In a way it was a large-scale social experiment involving

both the company's relationship with its employees off and on the job, as well as their interaction with the surrounding culture. This is an aspect that will attract more and more curious sociologists and historians

in the future."

Tom Barger, a geologist who grew up in North Dakota, joined the California Arabian Standard Oil Company, predecessor to Aramco, in 1937. Initially involved in exploration activities, he rose through the ranks in a variety of company positions, including Government Relations, becoming president of Aramco in 1959 and CEO in 1968.

*Aramco World* chronicled his career in a story when he retired in 1969, calling him "the most intelligent, resourceful, imaginative, judicious, energetic and honest executive east of Rockefeller Center." He died in 1986.

The photos in his collection provide striking perspectives on the company and the kingdom. They capture everything from exploration vistas with pathfinders like Chief Geologist Max Steineke and guide Khamis ibn Rimthan to Saudi Government activities involving members of the royal family. Many have not been made public before.

Ilo Battigelli's daughter Danielle, who lives in Oxford, England, said in August that her family had donated her father's Saudi photo collection to the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford.

"We handed over the negatives and

rights recently, and expect that they will progress with cataloging, etc., as soon as they have capacity. I'm sure the museum will be a good custodian for the future, and will make the photos accessible to researchers and others interested in the area and culture."

Battigelli lived in the Italian Camp near the refinery, home to hundreds of Italians from Eritrea whom Aramco hired beginning in 1944. They had been interned by the British when World War II broke out and remained in Eritrea until Aramco put them on the payroll.

Battigelli worked in the Engineering Dept., initially photographing and cataloging items related to the refinery expansion project, but his favorite activity was shooting local scenes with a large-format Rollieflex 3.5 camera. In his off-hours he worked in a self-built studio near Ras Tanura.

His black-and-white photos are notable for capturing local scenes and faces just before the kingdom underwent rapid modernization.

He also had a knack for making friends and being in the right place at the right time, enabling him to photograph leaders of government in eastern Saudi Arabia—and even King Abdulaziz when he arrived in Ras Tanura on a visit in February 1947. He adopted the moniker "Ilo the Pirate" in part because he built his studio on a beach where, legend had it, corsairs used to land and he often wore the dress of a pirate when photographing.

"It was a unique place time and place to be," he told *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* in 2005, when he was 83. "I got to know all kinds of people as humans. I enjoyed the family feel of their society, where everyone was a friend.

"There was good weather there for photo opportunities.... The excitement I found there was never quite repeated."

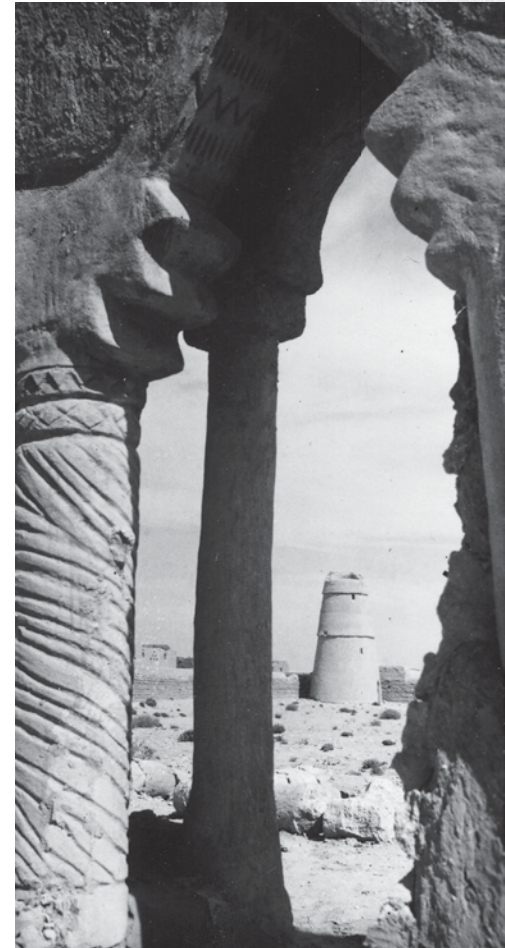
After leaving the kingdom in 1954, he photographed in the United States, Africa and Europe. His work has been exhibited around the world.

Battigelli died in 2009 and is survived by his wife Pauline and daughters Danielle Battigelli and Michelle Merley.

Ilo Battigelli's sensitive black-and-white portraits of townsmen, Bedouins and farmers capture nearly vanished ways of life in eastern Saudi Arabia and reflect the photographer's special rapport with his subjects. "He was very much a 'people person' who responded to individuals around him," says his daughter Danielle. His pictures, shot from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s, have been published in *King Abd al-Aziz: A Life in Photographs* by Al-Turath for the Ministry of Information, and *The Story of the Eastern Province and Saudi Arabia by the First Photographers* by William Facey.



Photos from the T.C. Barger Collection show, *counter-clockwise from below*: King Abdulaziz at the opening of the Dhahran Air Base in 1947; Tom Barger's wife Kathleen and sons Mike, left, and Tim boarding an Aramco taxi in 1948; Barger striking a comic pose under slabs of *sabkha* with guides (l-r) Abu Nasir, Khamis ibn Rimthan and Bin Dhabit, near Camp Tarfa in the Rub' al-Khali, in 1938; ruins at al-Sarrar, 180 miles northwest of Dhahran, in 1939; and guards celebrating the meeting of Crown Prince Sa'ud and Emir Hamid Al Khalifa of Bahrain in al-Khobar in 1937.





# 20 BRAT 'TRIBE' REUNITES FOR 17

## 16<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL BASH

by JENN HARBERT (AB75)

This year's Brats Reunion, our 16th biennial gathering, proved yet another one to remember.

The Reunion (always with a capital R) unfolded on Memorial Day weekend at the inviting and aptly named Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina. Indeed, several very large yachts were moored along the nearby Intercoastal Waterway, within easy walking distance of the hotel, and word soon got around that one—*The Seven Seas*—belonged to Steven Spielberg.

That sparked some conversation about how cool it would be to take a self-guided tour of the ship around 3 a.m. But I don't think anyone managed to do that—either because the filmmaker had better security than we knew when growing up, or because we're just not as Bratty as we once were.

Most of the 336 registered attendees arrived by Thursday, May 25, and began gathering outside by the pool. A pall of sadness soon settled over our group when we learned we had just lost one of our own, David Owen (DH73). His wife Paula and their children Hollyn and Steven were scheduled to arrive in time for the start of Reunion that day, while his son David did not plan to attend due to work. David senior, however, had come early to Scuba dive with his brothers Rick and Tom and his niece Jenny. Sadly, that Tuesday he suffered a fatal heart attack while diving.

When Hirath Gori (DH75), Aramco-

Brats, Inc. president, opened Reunion, he called for a moment of silence in David's memory. I had never heard so many Brats quiet down so quickly. Tears ran freely.

The Owen family history is steeped in Aramco, beginning in 1947 when David's father Bill joined Tapline as legal counsel. He retired as Aramco's general counsel in 1975. David began his company career at Aramco Services Company in Houston, then joined his brothers Tom and Rick and sister Randa in Dhahran. He had worked for Saudi Aramco for 20 years and was due to retire in October.

Brats are a tribe, related through our common history. As the Owen family gathered and waited for formalities to be finalized, it was very special to see the Brat family gather around, offering each of the Owens hugs and sharing stories about David. It is always hard to know how to handle such a sudden loss, but the Owens expressed their appreciation for the love and support extended. We all hoped that we helped start the healing

process for the family.

Most of us were planning to head home right after Reunion, but one attendee was just beginning his trip. My old friend Scott Tanner (RT70) was taking up the Iron Butt Challenge and heading to Deadhorse, Alaska, about as far north in the U.S. as you can go, on his motorcycle.

Scott, who rides about 40,000 miles a year, began the challenge in Key West on May 24. Lucky for us, he decided to spend a couple of days with his tribe before continuing.

He reported later that he spent just over 17 days in the saddle, averaging 672 miles per day. After bouncing over rocky roads in Alaska, he ended up trucking his motorcycle down from Prudhoe Bay to Fairbanks—500 miles—to have a tire replaced. Back on the road again he met an Arctic front that dropped the temperature from the 80s to the mid-40s, with snow flurries in mountain passes. He spent a night in a maintenance shed and put on 600 miles the next day. Iron Butt, indeed!

Again this year I kept an eye out for a first-time Reunion-goer. It didn't take me long to find her: Georgia Kent, the only AB81 attendee, was talking to my roommate Pam Branch (AB79) with a look of pure joy on her face.

She told me the "magic" started as she waited to register. Someone said something that tripped a switch and she started to cry,

A smiling crew of Brats and guests posed for the traditional group photo at the 16th biennial Brats Reunion in Fort Lauderdale.

right there in line. "I might be in this Florida hotel for the first time, but I'm *home*," she told herself. "These people around me understand who I am, even though I'm the only person here from my class!"

When Brats gather, we start using our own language. It's English, but we add Arabic words and phrases. Some of us are fluent in Arabic, but even if not, some words translate subconsciously for everyone: "yellah," "hamee hamee," to get each other to hurry up, or "shwaye shwaye," to do the opposite.

If we spent much of our youth in the kingdom, we were often disappointed when we first returned stateside and people didn't understand our lingo. When we get together we can speak freely again. That's part of the joy of being in a tribe.

I met two retired Dhahran teachers, Nell Bess and Pat Moody, who thoroughly enjoyed catching up with each other. Nell, whose husband Bob was a Texaco loanee, taught fourth and fifth grade in Dhahran from 1979 to 1990. She attended with her son Eric (DH88).

Pat mainly substituted for other teachers out on long leave. She came to Reunion with her daughter Charlyn Moody Page (DH77). Their husband/father, Burnie Moody, who retired as Aramco's chief photographer, shot many stories for *Aramco World*.

This year we added an amazing artist, Helen Ellerbe-Avalon (DH74), to our *suq*. She recently discovered she enjoyed painting Saudi scenes from her childhood, among other subjects. She reminded me of the wonderful times she and I had during our 1973 French Trip, when we spent time in Evian and Paris with the group headed

Di Knipfel Slingluff (AB75) concentrates as she adorns Mirion "Mi" Robertson (RT68) with one of her popular henna designs.



by Martha Frey, the French teacher from Dhahran.

Although Reunion turnout was lower this year than in the past, those who came had a wonderful time. My classmate Di Knipfel Slingluff, who recently took up henna design, found many willing subjects for her hobby.

The Hilton's layout offered several seating areas for groups, and Brats filled many chairs inside as well as outside around the pool. Yearbooks circulated like cards from a well-used deck.

The most memorable time for me was reconnecting with two members of the Zerco family I'd been close to during my years in Abqaiq, from 1968 to 1977. My classmate Sheila and her brother Karl (AB78) live near Tampa, a four-hour drive away. It had been 10 years since we'd spent much time together, so we made the most of every minute to catch up. I believe the light attendance fostered more time for deep dives among many Brats.

May 28 was banquet night and many attendees wore Arab finery, keeping up a Reunion tradition. Mary Ann Bracken-Ballard (RT69) was an outstanding example. Her brilliant smile and beautiful Bedu necklace and bracelets, along with her earrings and a name ring typically ordered by Brats, stopped me in my tracks. We love to mix things up!

With her were Lily Aboassaly-Skaff-Tawile (AB61) and her brother George Aboassaly-Skaff (AB69).

The buffet-style banquet allowed plenty of time for us to wander. Some Brats had *Sun and Flare* and *Arabian Sun* clippings and others continued connecting with old friends. It was loud and got even louder during the traditional auction, as Marie Littlejohn Dunn (DH77) walked another one of her outstanding handmade Reunion Quilts around during bidding. It got even more boisterous when Hirath Ghori auctioned off his mustache, which some lucky Brat took home in an envelope. I wonder if it will be re-auctioned next time?

This was a brilliant Reunion overall.



Yearbooks drew many eyes at the reunion. Here, Laurie Long checks out ninth-grade photos at a table with DH77 classmates, her husband Robert "Bo" Long and Charlyn Moody Page.

Sandra Kerr Louchard (DH84) chaired the Reunion Committee, ably assisted by Annie Oskam (DH74), Hirath Ghori, Gina Hess Tanner (AB76), Marie Littlejohn Dunn, Liz Germani (RT84), Caroline Homolka Maters (RT84), Jason Sexton (DH84), Val Kelly (DH84), Amber Perkins Neal (DH86), Jeff Neal (DH86) and Melanie Penoyar Perez (DH87). They graciously volunteered their time and worked hard to make Reunion another great one. Thank you all, and see you in two!

Mary Ann Bracken-Ballard (RT69) is resplendent in her Bedouin jewelry on banquet night, the traditional time Brats "dress up" in Arab finery.



# ARTIST

## EXTRAORDINAIRE!

It all started on Facebook. In mid-May, Helen Ellerbe-Avalon (DH74) posted on the AramcoBrats Group page some of the oil paintings of Saudi subjects she was bringing to the Reunion *suq*. Normally when I'm on Facebook I simply skim, but when my eyes hit her paintings they skidded to a halt.

I stared. I found her website: <http://helenavalon.fineartstudioonline.com/>. I knew I had to see her desert tableaux and paintings of traditional Saudi artifacts in person!

I wasn't the only one to react that way. Other Brats posted that they wanted her paintings even if they weren't attending Reunion.

"What a delightful surprise it was to hear from so many people," Helen said. "As I'd see names from long ago, it was as if the Saudi years came alive again and I felt reunited with this wonderful community."

At the *suq* itself, she told visitors she was working with a print shop to make more copies to meet the demand.

Although she's not a novice, I discovered that her work on Saudi subjects came relatively recently—and with a bang!

"My sister has a painting hanging in her living room that I did when I was in fifth or sixth grade," she told me. "I remember painting a lot as a teenager, but then only sporadically in my 20s and 30s. Painting was a fun activity that I would have grouped together with my photography, sewing and ceramic hobbies.

"All of my painting up to that point had either been in acrylic or watercolor; I'd never tried oil. Then, at the age of 47, I tried painting in oil and it was as though my world shifted on its axis. It was truly a revelation. I knew that painting in oil is how I wanted to spend the rest of my life.

"Annie Oskam and Karen Morrow—both in my

class—told me about the *suq* and suggested that I do Arabian-themed paintings to sell there. However, there were just too many other things that I was working on at the time and I didn't act on the idea."

She didn't decide to attend Reunion until March and only then started work on the Arabian Series. "I completed six paintings and loved every moment," she said.

"I'm working in a newly completed art studio that my husband and I built onto our home. It's a large space that allows me

to easily paint on large canvases and it felt as if the Arabian series paintings practically painted themselves. It was so much fun!

"A week or two before the reunion I posted pictures of the paintings on the AramcoBrats Facebook page and was a little shocked by the wonderful response and requests for prints.... I still can't believe that I actually managed to get prints together in those hectic days before the reunion!"

Though she likes to paint *al fresco*, she's turned to photos to portray Saudi scenes.

"I most enjoy painting from life, but that becomes difficult when painting camels or even desert scenes since I now live in Orlando," she said. "Painting from photos has become increasingly enjoyable as I've given myself more permission to use them simply as guideposts for a painting, rather than letting them dictate it.

"Painting is most fun when it becomes a dance between what you think should be there and what the painting has to say about that."

In that regard, many Brats would agree, Helen's delicate dance with oils has made her our own Saudi Ginger Rogers.

Gaily caparisoned camels were among the most popular paintings in Helen Ellerbe-Avalon's *suq* exhibition.



Helen Ellerbe-Avalon (DH74) and her brother Jim (DH71) staffed the *suq* display of her Arabian artwork, which drew so many reunion-goers that she sold out of some subjects.



# aramcoexpats.com TURNS 15 WITH A SMILE

BY ARTHUR CLARK



**AramcoExpats.com, which is celebrating its 15th birthday this year, was an unexpected child.**

"I always had an interest in publishing, but never imagined I would end up in this field," said Vicci Turner, who cofounded the digital publication for Aramcons past and present, and potential new employees, with her son Rusty Swayne in 2002. "Life is full of surprises!"

*AramcoExpats.com*, based in Bellingham, Wash., is truly a family operation.

Swayne's wife Kara, whom he married a few years after *AramcoExpats.com* started up, worked part-time as a writer and editor for the website. This year, she undertook content management, assisted by an outside contractor. Turner continues to help with content acquisition and is responsible for advertising and business operations for what's become a major undertaking.

*AramcoExpats.com* has grown into "a massive website with an archive holding

over 2,300 articles, a gallery featuring over 18,000 photos and an in-house PR service that has published over 5,000 'Events' and 'Travel Club' announcements," Turner said in July. "Aramco ExPats Forum alone has averaged 2,250 page views daily in the past 12 months." The forum enables users to join in chat sessions on various topics.

Just over half the website's readers are in the United States, followed by Saudi Arabia (14 percent), England (six percent), Canada (five percent), Pakistan (three percent) and India (two percent), with the remainder sprinkled around the world. It has a total of more than 25,000 Facebook and Twitter followers and 1,800 LinkedIn connections.

Turner taught school in Abqaiq and 'Udhailiyah and then worked as a planning-and-programs analyst in several departments, giving her a good overview of Saudi Aramco and all four of its communities.

Her son Rusty grew up in the kingdom, as did his brother Brad. Rusty graduated from Washington State University with a degree in civil engineering. While working as an engineer he continued his education in computer science, which has proved critical for the website's success.

"We could not run AramcoExpats

Vicci Turner, center, poses with her son and AramcoExpats.com cofounder Rusty Swayne, and Rusty's wife Kara, a longtime website staffer.

without the active involvement of a programmer with Rusty's knowledge, experience and skill set," Turner said. "He does all website development and maintenance for the site," which is in its sixth generation.

"It continues to amaze me how much our readers enjoy visiting our website every week," Turner noted. "Our readers write us and let us know how much they appreciate us helping to keep everyone informed and linked together."

One recent comment summed up that feeling. "This website is an OASIS!" the reader wrote.

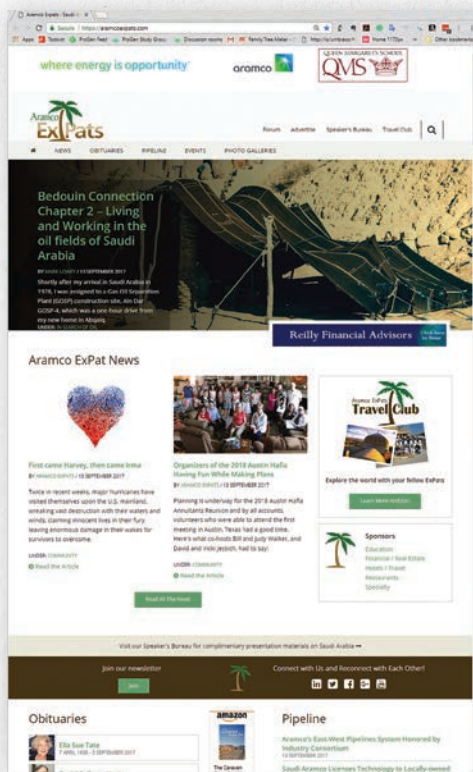
The website has been the doorway to many "adventures," Turner said. "One of the greatest...was finding the 'children' who attended the king's visit [to Dhahran] in 1947" with their mothers, and then attending Saudi Aramco's 75th-anniversary celebration with them in 2008. She has also accompanied teachers to Saudi Arabia.

Another plus of running the site is that many of the authors of the articles it has published turned into friends, Turner says.

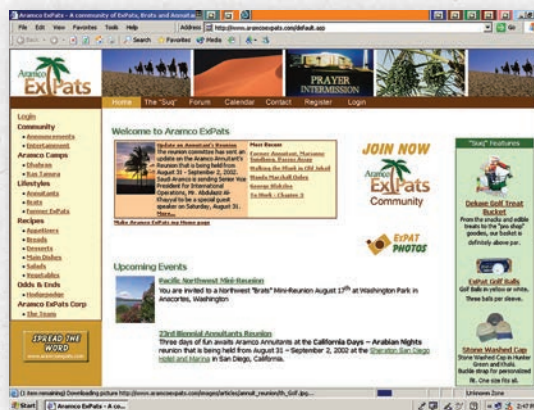
They have included the late retiree Nestor Sander, a geologist who arrived in Saudi Arabia in the late 1930s, and Dhahran poet Nimah Nawwab. Turner's "No. 1 favorite author" is Tim Barger, the son of the late Aramco President and CEO Tom Barger, who has supplied "many wonderful stories and ... boundless encouragement."

*AramcoExpats.com* has changed significantly over the years. "The hours required to turn out a weekly newsletter and keep the website updated have increased 10-fold!" Turner noted.

Despite that, "I would do it again," she said. "The website has introduced me to a multitude of friends and acquaintances and opened so many fascinating avenues of interest that I would never have otherwise experienced."



New (left) and old (below): *AramcoExpats.com* has undergone a remarkable evolution in 15 years.



# Ras Tanura Photo Brings Back

## Memories



Judy Bauer, eight, and her sister Susan, five, and two Bedouin cameleers frame the Ras Tanura Refinery in this 1946 photo, shot the year the girls arrived with their mother Mildred to reunite with Ken Webster, who had come two years before to work on the refinery-upgrade project.

# T

This year's July 12 issue of *The Arabian Sun* featured a 1946 photo of Judy and Susan Webster, ages eight and five, standing beside a couple of Bedouin cameleers overlooking Ras Tanura Refinery. The picture, shot by Robert Yarnall Richie, brought back many memories for Judy Webster Bauer, who lives in Seattle, Wash., with her husband Dale. Sadly, Sue Webster Slavin, of San Antonio, Texas, died July 25.

The girls landed in Saudi Arabia with their mother Mildred in March 1946, joining Ken Webster, who had arrived in 1944 to work at the Ras Tanura Refinery upgrade project. He served initially as supervisor of Construction and later as supervisor of Maintenance and Construction.

In March 1947 Judy was among the Aramco youngsters who met King Abdulaziz when he visited Dhahran. She returned to Dhahran in 2008 with her son Chris as part

of the delegation of those children—this time to meet King Abdullah during Saudi Aramco's 75th anniversary celebration. Sue could not attend because she was ill.

Although Judy does not remember anything specific about the 1946 photo, she thinks it was taken "at the end of the beach where we lived in an apartment converted from barracks." She recalled that Nan Cooper—now Nan Cooper Healey—was the only other American child in Ras Tanura when she and her sister arrived. In fact, her father reported to Bill Cooper when he went to work there.

No other children arrived in Ras Tanura until later in 1946, Judy said.

The girls were home-schooled to start. "My mother taught me with assignments that Sam Whipple [Aramco's first certified schoolteacher] brought her periodically, because at that time there wasn't a school in Ras Tanura, only in Dhahran. I was in third grade at the time.

"School was later held in the Dining Hall. We moved back and forth between Ras Tanura and Dhahran, before settling permanently in Dhahran."

Her dad left the kingdom in 1959 to work in the company's New York headquarters.

Judy said her return to Saudi Arabia

in 2008 after a half-century's absence "was a wonderfully overwhelming and emotional experience for me, since I never expected to be able to return.... Staying in my 'old neighborhood,' sharing the trip with our son Chris and old friends who had lived near my family, and then seeing the many changes to my 'hometown' were all very special.

"One of the best parts of returning to Ras Tanura was when we toured the Tower at the Terminal and I spotted the part of the beach where I used to live.

"Most of my childhood was spent in Dhahran, so seeing the changes to the town beyond my old neighborhood was quite amazing. Dinner our last evening on the patio of my home was also very special. The tree on the patio was still there, but 50 years taller, the hedges and other plantings my parents cared for were gone, and the remodeling of the house inside, brought back lots of memories as well. It was a great finale to the trip."

Judy's nephew Ken Slavin has compiled his grandparents' Arabian correspondence and photos. A letter Ken Webster wrote home in late 1945 shows how eager he was to see his family again and provides a little context for his work at Ras Tanura.

"These cards were made in the Italian Camp [on the beach near the refinery], and were all we had available," he said. "My thoughts are not on Christmas, but on Mildred and the kiddies coming to Arabia."

"I wrote her November 22 the official invitation to come out, as soon as transportation is available she will be here. Haven't heard from her yet about the plane she has, and hope my letter did not go astray, for my greatest lack is her and the kids."

"It will be fun here for them, nothing to do except grow fat and sassy, and it is a healthy climate. When it gets hot, the air conditioning makes the houses and offices comfortable, and when it is raw and chilly we run warm water through the air conditioning and warm the houses."

"Our beach is beautiful, the food is grand, the new houses will be really nice, and we have so many friends here from other locations we worked."

"I have no news, the last big unit starts up Dec. 22 and then we shall be running about 76,000 barrels a day. We met the schedule set, and had a lot of heartaches doing it, but proud we all are of the part we played in building this project so far from home and during wartime."

Mildred Webster talked about her arrival on March 11, 1945 in her first letter home. Dated March 15, it provides details of the journey from New York to Dhahran, via Newfoundland; Shannon, Ireland; Paris; Lydda, Palestine (where they were diverted from Athens due to bad weather); and Cairo.

The plane from New York on March

6 "was a lovely one—a Douglas C-49 Skymaster called 'The Sphinx,'" she wrote. "Seats for 41 and crew of six—we only had 31 passengers. Two restrooms, a cloakroom, storeroom and kitchen. Reclining seats—heat, blankets and pillows."

"The children were not confined to their seats—and with the four other kids [bound for Dhahran] managed to get around and visit and not get tired. The crew was swell—and our little hostess, Miss Johnston, was a little blonde beauty—but we lost her on the first stop."

They departed from Cairo at midnight March 11 and landed in Dhahran an hour earlier than planned, at 5:30 a.m.

"Well, the men all had a swell time kidding us and we all got busy powdering and fixing up and bless Patty when we landed there wasn't a soul there to meet us," Mildred wrote. "They didn't even know the plane was due."

"It was rumored for days and the whole town had been out the day before and the men had been there on and off for days, but finally gave up and went home.... The men did razz us then!"

"They called Dhahran right away and pretty soon they all began to arrive and what a happy reunion for them...."

The family got to Ras Tanura later that day, after "a delicious breakfast" at a home in Dhahran.

The Websters' apartment, "very roomy and nicely furnished...is all much nicer than I expected and know we shall be very happy here," Mildred wrote. "We settled our luggage in the apartment and went to the family mess hall for a most delicious dinner with all sorts of service."

"There are three 'boys' and they really wait on you. The kids will be [spoiled] rotten. They are all fascinated by children and love them. We drove out to the houses, which are grand—ours is right

on the beach and believe me, the Persian Gulf is beautiful. It is about four shades of the most gorgeous blue you have ever seen and the sand is white and fine."

Ten days later Mildred wrote that she and the girls had settled into a routine and were fast learning the ropes. "The sun is wicked and both girls got a real sunburn on their legs and faces very quickly," she said. "So, we are taking it gradually now!"

There is no word in Mildred's letters about the photo taken with the two camel-borne Bedouin, but she does note that three men from the refinery brought the girls a black lamb as a gift just after they arrived. Robert Yarnall Richie also captured the girls and the lamb in another photo taken at that time.

Judy remembers that shot. It shows "my sister and me running with our pet black lamb from our apartment toward our mother on the beach," she fondly recalls.



Judy Webster Bauer, top, lives in Seattle, Wash., with her husband Dale. Her sister Sue Webster Slavin, who lived in San Antonio, Texas, died July 25. Their mother Mildred worried that the girls would be spoiled "rotten" by all the attention they received in Ras Tanura when they arrived in 1946.

Mildred Bauer and daughters Judy, left, and Susan, right, sat for this passport photo in 1946.



# IN MEMORIAM

HELEN V. ABATE

July 26, 2017

Survived by her husband, retiree Charles Abate, and children Sandra and Kenny. The family may be contacted c/o Johnson Funeral Home, 4321 Lake St, Lake Charles, LA 70605.

SYED MAHMOOD ALI

May 30, 2017

He joined Aramco as a secretary in 1955 and retired as a senior refinery planner in 1985. Survived by his wife Zahida Ali and daughters Seema, Salma, Shama and Naheed. Correspondence may be sent to [mahmood.ali.family@outlook.com](mailto:mahmood.ali.family@outlook.com).

ASTRID AUSTERFIELD

June 25, 2017

She worked in Office Services and Executive Office Services, retiring as a supervisor after a 20-year career.

MIZA ZAHIR BEG

March 12, 2017

He joined the Training Dept. in 1972 and retired in 1993. Correspondence may be sent to his son Naeem Baig at [Naeemb1911@hotmail.com](mailto:Naeemb1911@hotmail.com).

WAYNE J. BOLLAN

March 9, 2017

He joined Aramco in 1978 and retired in 2008. Survived by his wife Nonalux ("Lek") and children Robert, Angela and Katherine. Correspondence may be sent to Nonalux at 311 John Henry Dr., Henderson, NV 89014.

CHARLES WILLIAM "BILL"  
BROWN

April 26, 2017

He worked as a geologist in Dhahran from 1950-'57. Survived by his wife Winnie, daughters Sheryl Cherry and Elizabeth Cardell and sons George and William. Correspondence may be sent to Winnie at 202 Crosstown Dr., #1008 Peachtree City, GA 30269.

JIM L. DYKES

July 20, 2017

He worked as a driller. Survived by his wife Anong and sons Thomas and James. The family may be contacted c/o Hamil Family Funeral Home, 6449 Buffalo Gap Rd., Abilene, TX 79606.

BRETT EIKENBARY

April 6, 2017

He joined the company as an engineer in 1977 and worked in Ras Tanura, The Hague and Italy. Survived by his wife Susan and daughters Alexandra, Brook Gerace and Natasha. The family may be contacted c/o Ahlberg Funeral Chapel, 326 Terry St., Longmont, CO 80501.

TRUUS GRONEMAN-LE POOLE

July 29, 2017

Survived by her husband Hans Groneman and children Carolien and Jan. She was a member of the Dhahran Theatre Group. Correspondence may be sent to Hans at [jltgroneman@hotmail.com](mailto:jltgroneman@hotmail.com).

BARBARA HAUKE

June 24, 2017

She taught kindergarten in Ras Tanura and transferred to the Aviation Dept. in Dhahran. She was active in the Dhahran Chorale and the Dhahran Theatre Group and hosted art exhibits in her home, known as Panache Gallery. After departing in 1986, she taught adult literacy on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico.

HENRY P. LANG

July 10, 2017

He joined Power Systems in 1980 and retired in 1983. Survived by his wife Theresia and son Peter.

JOAN ELLEN McCABE

August 8, 2017

She worked as a secretary in New York in the 1950s. Survived by her children Robert, Jr., Nancy Thall, William, Kathleen Chastain and Patricia Rawls. The family may be contacted c/o Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic Church, 130 N.W. Murray Rd., Lee's Summit, MO.

DOROTHY A. MCCARTHY

June 9, 2017

She taught at the Dhahran Elementary School from 1976-'81 and served as a Dhahran Girl Scout leader. Survived by her husband Duane and children Kristi and Daniel. Correspondence may be sent to Duane at [ddkd7777@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ddkd7777@sbcglobal.net).

F. HERBERT NEUMAN

August 11, 2017

He worked at *The Arabian Sun* in Dhahran and was involved in writing *Golden Swords and Pots and Pans* (1963), traveling with author and Aramco chef José Arnold and the royal retinue.

GEORGETTE PORTO

July 23, 2017

Survived by her husband Albert and three children, including son James and daughter Mary Ellen.

ROBERT RIGSBY

June 12, 2017

He joined the Petroleum Engineering organization in 1965 and retired in 1985 as general manager of Northern Area Producing, moving with his wife Jeanne to a ranch near Heflin, Ala. He served three terms as mayor of Heflin between 1988 and 2004. Despite his success in politics, he called his time in the kingdom "the best 20 years of my life." Survived by his wife, sons David, Robert and Randall, and daughters Dorothy Brunson and Gail Blandamar. Correspondence may be sent to Randall at [rrigsby@api4design.com](mailto:rrigsby@api4design.com).

CHARLES M. "CHUCK" RILEY

April 26, 2017

He worked for Aramco for three years at the end of his career in geology. Survived by his wife Carol Ann and his sons Rick, Rusty, Robin and Roger. The family may be contacted c/o First Congregational Church, 10840 Beinhorn Rd., Houston, TX 7702.

DAMAS RODRIGUEZ, JR.

June 15, 2017

He retired from Saudi Aramco in 2007. Survived by his wife Regina and children Gloria Ralston and Eduardo. The family may be contacted c/o Garza Funeral Home, 4571 S FM 1329, San Diego, TX 78384-4571.

HAROLD M. ROWLAND

March 27, 2017

He worked in Abqaiq from 1963-'66. Survived by his wife Jan, daughter Rhonda Parault and son Ren. The family may be contacted c/o Blackwater United Methodist Church, 10000 Blackwater Rd., Central, LA 70714.

JOHN S. SAWRAN

May 27, 2017

He worked for Aramco for a decade. Survived by his wife Vacharee Klaykloung and sons William and Stephen. The family may be contacted c/o Baldwin-Fairchild Oaklawn Funeral Home, 5000 Country Rd. 46A, Sanford, FL 32771.

JOHN SCHNAUTZ

May 7, 2017

He worked in Dhahran and The Hague. Survived by his wife Barbara, daughters Patricia, Joann and

Anita, and sons Leslie and Tom. The family may be contacted at [ashevilleareaalternative.com](http://ashevilleareaalternative.com).

FRED W. SQUIRES

June 11, 2017

He worked for Aramco as a civil engineer in the 1980s. Survived by his wife Melody and children Chris Squires, Blair Liss and Taryn Turner.

HARRILL S. WHITE

April 19, 2017

He had a 20-year career with Aramco. Survived by his wife Sharon, son Mark,

daughter Jennifer and stepson Justine Bertone. The family may be contacted c/o Quinn-Shalz Family Funeral Home, 3600 Third St. S, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250.

NARGIS ZAHEER

April 27, 2017

Survived by her husband Syed Hasan Zaheer and sons Ali and Raza. She was active in Ras Tanura womens' groups. Correspondence may be sent to Syed at 16 Wood Oak Place SW, Calgary, Alberta, T2W 3R2, Canada.

## PETE BALLARD: 'BE BRILLIANT'

By Margot Abbott

Every year, for years, Pete Ballard sent me a card for my birthday, but this May, no card. In June, still no card and I began to worry. Coward that I am, I wrote a note instead of phoning.

Shortly after that, a formal letter came from an attorney in West Virginia saying that "our friend, Pete" had passed away in March at 85. Like all such losses, it took a while to sink in.

I lived in California; he lived in West Virginia, neither of us with a lot of disposable income for trips. But we sent cards and newspaper clippings (him) and play flyers (me). Once or twice a year, he'd phone and tell me about one of his students or his latest fashion-doll exhibit.

Pete was born in West Virginia, got a degree in education from Concord College and began his teaching career. He also began working with a local theater group and focused on costume design. He had a chance to go pro but stuck with teaching, which he loved. He used education as a means to see the world, taking a job with Industrial Training in Abqaiq in 1959.

I was about 11 when he made friends with my parents. He immediately picked up on my artistic inclinations, which were many and unfocused. I drew, made clothes for my dolls, took music lessons and wanted to be a dancer.

I got cast as the queen in the sixth-grade play. My mother mentioned this to Pete and he took me to the *suq* for yards of cheap hot-pink acetate.

Spreading it out on the floor of our living room, he did an astonishing thing. He took a pair of scissors and cut out the pattern of a costume. And what a costume! It

had a tall collar edged with ermine (white cotton balls dabbed with black ink), chiffon sleeves and a hoop skirt.

He was talented but even more: He was generous with his talent.

He designed costumes for the junior-high musical, transformed the clubhouse at the holidays and produced, directed and designed plays, including "Gigi." I worked as his assistant on that one. But the most important thing he did for me was to talk about being an artist. He talked about "when" not "if."

After leaving Aramco in 1967, he taught English as second language in the Far East and then returned to the U.S. to teach English at the North Carolina School of the Arts until he retired. A move back to West Virginia landed him in Peterstown, his father's hometown.

In North Carolina, he became involved in costume conservation and worked with institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He told me about being sent a uniform of George Washington's and knowing he was the same height as the general, against all conservation dictates, he tried it on. It fit!

This work left him with bits of fabric and being friends with Jane Withers, a child-star of the 1930s, he decided to make her a doll. One doll led to another and, realizing that smaller museums could not afford costume collections, he decided to make one doll for each decade of the 19th century for display. Eventually, the various exhibits traveled all over the South and Midwest.

In the last couple of years, he had donated all the dolls. He never made any money from the dolls—or from his paintings.



Pete Ballard sits proudly beside one of the many fashion dolls he created and clothed.

He began accumulating honors and recognition for his contribution to the arts. He was proud to be entered into the *Congressional Record* by Sen. Joseph Manchin, made a Golden Alumnus at Concord and awarded the Order of the Arts and History Letters by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

And always there were the stories about famous people he had met, among them Winston Churchill, Vivien Leigh and King Hussein of Jordan. He was good friends with Sarah Churchill, Winston's daughter.

He made friends because he liked and was interested in people, including the 11-year-old me.

I hadn't seen him for 20 years, but he was part of my life, always there, always encouraging. I worked in theater partly because of him and believed in certain truths about that work because of him: Less is more and making do is part of the fun.

**NOTE:** The author, the daughter of Fred and Jeanne Abbott, is a stage director and writer. Sand Hill Review Press recently republished her historical novel *The Last Innocent Hour, set in Berlin in the 1930s*.

PLEASANT DAYS FALL 2017

# Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah الأيام الجميلة

ISSN-1319-1512

Aramco Services Company  
Public Affairs Department  
P.O. Box 2106  
Houston, Texas 77252-2106

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Houston, TX  
Permit No. 625

Dorothy Miller shot this photograph of the harbor at al-Khobar in 1951, four years after arriving in Dhahran to work in the Law Dept. A review of an exhibition of her pictures at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., in 2007, said her photographs provide "an impressive record of a country from the 1950s through the 1970s, less sophisticated, but timeless." A story about Miller's work appears on page six.

