

AUTHOR PROFILE

JBW TALKS WITH ANGELLA M. NAZARIAN

By Nicole Azuly



At a young age, Angella M. Nazarian was uprooted from her home in Iran and brought to her current neighborhood, Beverly Hills. Never quite feeling at home, Nazarian intertwines her emigration from Iran, immigration to America, and various travels in her memoir, *Life as a Visitor*.

Nicole Azuly: Most Iranians I know shut out their past and difficult upbringings. What inspired you to write your personal story? Was it a painful process?

Angella Nazarian: Not talking about negative circumstances is part of Iranian culture. However, two things led me to be more open: One was the fact that I have a psychology background so talking about things is in my nature. Also, I believe that everything meaningful needs to be heartfelt and full of passion; hence, this story is something I am extremely passionate about. My main motivation for writing this book was my children. I think it is important for them to learn what their parents and relatives have gone through. Writing the book was extremely hard. I sometimes would literally break down and cry as I was writing. Although it was difficult, writing *Life As a Visitor* was a growing experience for me. In the process of writing, writers often explore feelings they didn't know they had.

NA: In the beginning of the book you mentioned that while you were living in Iran you, along with all the other children, would wait for a man who would walk through the neighborhood with a "giant tin box." For a coin, you could peer in the two holes he cut in the box to see slides of foreign countries. Was this what made you interested in travel?

AN: Yes. However, I was also greatly influenced by my parents' travels as well as what I saw on television.

NA: I noticed that you frequently referred to your paternal grandmother. She seems to have made a positive impact on your life. Can you elaborate further on why she was your role model?

AN: Although I never met my grandmother, I feel a strong connection to her. She was the direct opposite of a typical Iranian woman. Despite living in an environment where many Jews were ashamed of being Jewish, my grandmother embraced her heritage. She wasn't afraid of being seen. She wore Western clothes when women of her generation were covered up. She was assertive and didn't mind not blending in.



LIFE AS A VISITOR

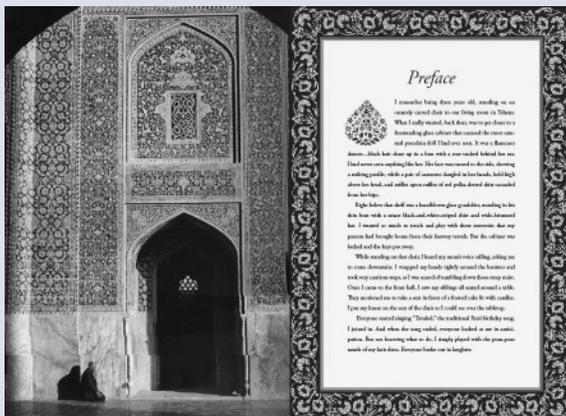
Angella M. Nazarian

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After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, some 70,000 Iranian Jews fled the newly formed Islamic state and flocked to the United States; it is estimated that 45,000 Iranian Jews call Los Angeles their home. In her poignant and gracefully written memoir, *Life as a Visitor*, Angella M. Nazarian recalls escaping Iran as a young girl of eleven and starting a new life in Beverly Hills. The author illuminates the relatively unexplored life of Iranian Jews in pre-Revolutionary Iran, where they

experienced upward mobility and assimilated into everyday Iranian life while holding fast to their Jewish identity. We learn of the pain and guilt she felt leaving her parents behind while her elder siblings raised her in Beverly Hills. The memoir captures the dilemma of being caught between two worlds, where immigrants feel "a longing to belong" and have the burden—and privilege—of defining a new identity. Nazarian leads us through her many adventures as she travels the world, realizing that through her journeys she is able to explore the vanishing details of her past and confront her changing identities. It is

through her wanderlust and her connection to the people and environments she encounters that Nazarian comes to terms with the many hybrid identities she holds, recognizing that she is not a citizen of one specific country but of the world. Published by Assouline—known for its photography, fashion, art, design and lifestyle books—*Life as a Visitor* features Nazarian's beautiful paintings, photographs, and poems in addition to her compelling narrative. **SS**



An Underfunded and Overexposed European Grand Tour, is a chronicle of the great post-modern undertaking: the journey to find yourself. Shukert's writing shimmers with self-deprecating humor and an eye for details both

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ridiculous and sublime. She sets off across Europe armed only with her freshly-minted bachelor's degree, an unstamped passport, and her own ambition. Imagine your wilder and infinitely cooler and funny older sister letting

you read her diary about her great adventure, and you get a sense of the vulnerability, humor, and strangely sound advice the writer offers. Shukert grew up Jewish in Nebraska, and her fish-out-of-water childhood experience follows her as she takes on semi-humiliating jobs across Europe and ill-advised love affairs (including one in Vienna with a man old enough to be her father, who may or may not be a descendant of Nazis) but you can't help but admire her spunk and resolve as she picks herself up, dusts herself off and goes in search of her heart. Unexpectedly inspiring, you can't resist cheering Shukert on. **RAE**



MAKE ME A WOMAN

Vanessa Davis

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If you are excited at the thought of peeping into a stranger's private diary, then Vanes-