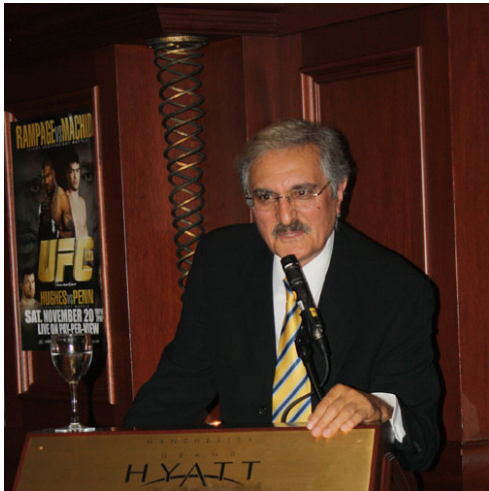


*Text of the speech delivered by Dr. A. Kamron Jabbari, President and CEO of Mazda Publishers, at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America in San Diego, California on November 20, 2010*

### “The Water Tower”

I am genuinely pleased and humbled that you have joined me at this anniversary reception for a large gath-



ering of scholars, authors, supporters, members of my family and friends, editors, and a few colleagues—an event that looks back at, without appearing to be presumptuous, a successful past, and looks ahead to a brighter future.

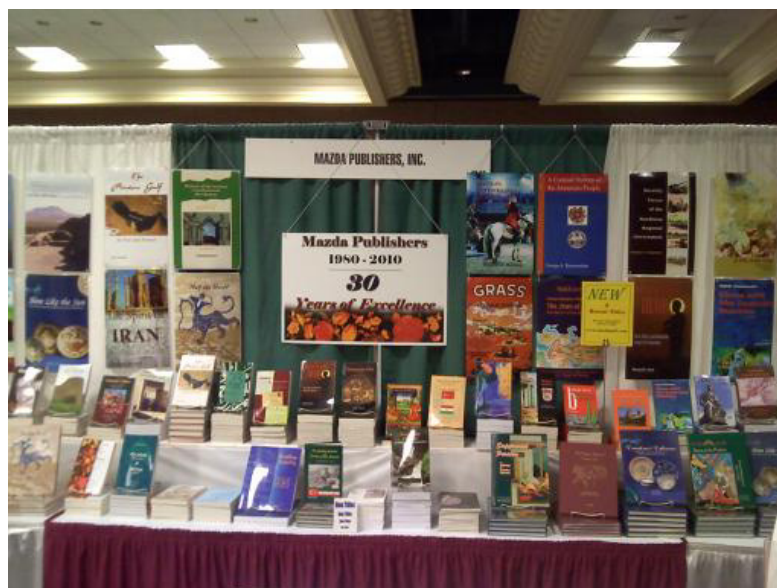
This year, 2010, marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of my company, Mazda Publishers. It would be very difficult for me to summarize 30 years of the company's history and achievements in a 15-to-20 minute presentation. What I have decided to do, instead, is to give you a brief background and then I will post the entire text of my speech on Mazda's website in a few days' time. Should

you be interested, you may log on and read in more detail what this company has achieved and its prospects for the future. In the full text that I'll place online I will also talk about types of publishing and more importantly, the future of publishing in the face of shifting technology and the popularity of electronic media vs. old-fashioned print media.

The topic of my speech this evening is “The Water Tower.” I can see the baffled looks on some of your faces. What is the connection between “book publishing” and a tank full of water attached to a metal scaffolding at least 50 feet above the ground? But if you'll bear with me, the connection will soon become clear.

Establishing this publishing company was for me the culmination of a dream that started not 30 years ago, but rather when I was a 12-year-old, first-year high school student, at Firooz Bahram Zoroastrian High School in Tehran. I used to single-handedly write and edit a “News Poster” covering the events in my classroom. I pasted several sheets of paper together to create a large poster size and hung it on the bulletin board in the hallway outside the classroom. But I don't wish to bore you with all those details,

leaving them instead for the article on my website. Instead I'll fast forward to the year 1979, and to be precise to June of 1979, when I decided to hold a symposium about the Iranian revolution that had toppled the Pahlavi regime a few months earlier and was still trying to define itself. At the time, I was as-



sistant professor of economics at a small college in the middle of Kentucky—Centre College. No other well-known institution was even thinking of holding such a conference, perhaps because they were all waiting to see how events unfolded in Iran. I invited 15 top scholars to attend this conference which I named “Iran: A Revolution in the Making.” More than 200 students and other interested folks flocked to our small campus for the three-day duration of the conference. It was, without a doubt, a successful event.

The symposium ended on June 24. In August 1979, I returned to Iran, having already resigned my position as assistant professor of economics, looking forward to being of some help in the “New Iran.” Well, like most dreams, my dream was shattered. In September Mr. Soorush and his cohorts, acting on orders from Ayatollah Khomeini, began a campaign to pacify the universities. In a last-ditch effort, I placed ads in local papers seeking a job as an engineer or a development economist, but to no avail. On November 2, 1979, I returned to Kentucky by way of Washington, DC. On November 4th, the entire world was shocked by the news of the hostage-taking of the US Embassy’s personnel by so-called “students.” Out of work, I decided to pay a visit to my old campus at Centre College and say “hello” to some of my colleagues. What I saw there was a turning point in my career. As George Bernard Shaw wrote in his short play *The Devil’s Disciple* “... it is in the hour of trial that a man finds his true profession.” It seemed that my “hour of trial” was about to begin.

I couldn’t help but notice a huge banner attached to the water tower on campus saying “Down with Iran.” Obviously, to have climbed such a high tower and risk falling down had taken some courage, but nonetheless some student zealots had found it a convenient forum to do just that in order to get their message across to the townspeople.

I wasn’t angry; dismayed perhaps, but then I asked myself what had made those college students who were to become our future leaders, behave so hastily. They had to have been totally aware of the conference that their only Iranian professor had organized to discuss this important international event only a few months earlier. It suddenly came to me: “the media.” Yes, the media and the power it could exert on people, even those who purport to be en-

rolled in institutions of higher learning. I dismissed their action by reminding myself that knowledge alone is not enough to make someone educated, what you also need is understanding. Perhaps these students did not understand what was really going on, the same as their students counterparts in Tehran who had taken hostages at the embassy.

Back then, of course, we did not have personal computers and high-speed Internet. We got our news primarily from three main sources: (1) TV, and not cable TV, (2) print media, and (3) the radio. So there I was, thinking that in order for me to have some impact on people, albeit very small, perhaps I should go back in time and be a 12-year-old high school student again, and start my own publishing house. Perhaps I could educate people and disseminate knowledge about what I believed was right and not print stuff that was politically correct or incorrect. Not to bend before centers of power and not publish things just to appease those with ill-gotten petroleum money in their pockets. After all, regardless of who we are—popes, imams, ayatollahs, priests, rabbis, prophets claiming to have descended from above the clouds, politicians—we are all the end results of conception of an egg and a sperm and a few minutes of passionate or dispassionate encounter.

To get started, I needed some money and having been out of work for nearly 6 months, I had no other choice but to cash in my TIAA benefit. I launched Mazda Publishers on January of 1980 in Lexington, Kentucky with a total capital of \$2,738.34—my entire TIAA benefit.

As my first project, I decided to edit the papers that were presented back in June, 1979 at the symposium. I contacted my good friend, Prof. Robert Olson, and together we compiled and edited a manuscript that eventually became Mazda’s first title. Today, Mazda Publishers stands alone and proud among many other fine presses. It is an independent publishing house privately held rather than being owned by a parent company or by a conglomerate. One of the great things about being an independent press is that we have considerable freedom to publish books on topics that we are most passionate about. I have chosen to publish about the Middle East and Central Asia in general, and Iran in particular. I am committed to bringing out the truth about Iran, my birthplace, a

country with a glorious ancient civilization that keeps getting older as new archeological sites are constantly being found. For example the discovery of a 7000-year-old jug of wine proves that people on the Iranian plateau were enjoying a good life long before the Genesis of the three Abrahamic religions. These truths I would like to share with the people of the world, especially my fellow citizens here in the United States, the country in which I have chosen to live and raise a family. It is the best combination of both worlds and no one can ask for any better combination than this.

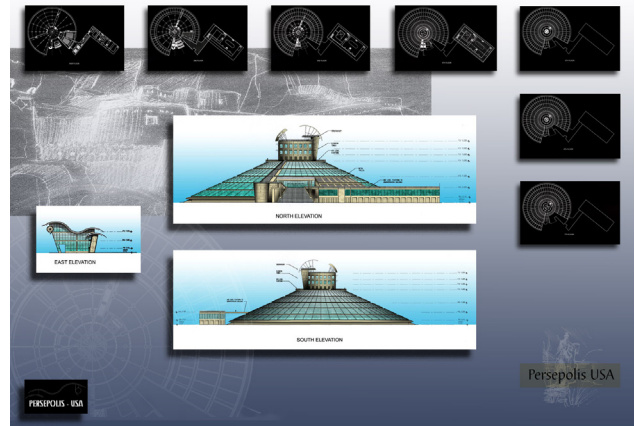
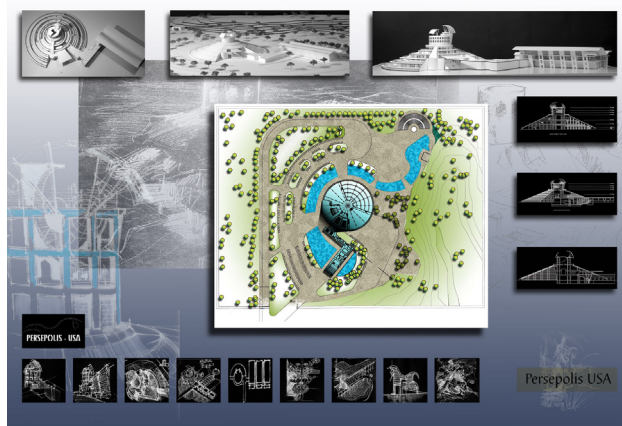
However book publishing is one thing and educating young people and the public is another. I have always believed that in order for scholars and intellectuals to make a difference in society, their messages should be understood by laymen. Scholars have numerous forums to talk and exchange ideas among themselves but what about the public? As the old



Persian saying goes, is it the word “snake” that we write or is it the representation of a “snake” that we draw that is most easily understood by the masses?

In 1995 I undertook to establish yet another organization with two purposes in mind: (1) to bridge the gap between scholars and the public by bringing them closer to each other, and (2) to lay the foundation for a two-year liberal arts college and eventually build it into a full-fledged accredited institution of higher learning.

Once again I felt like I was the lone wolf when it came to such an innovative idea. I established the Iranica Institute in 1995 when such institutions were not yet fashionable among Iranian expatriates. That dream may remain unfulfilled during my lifetime, but it



is a legacy I’m handing down to my two children, by placing its responsibility on their shoulders. Especially on the shoulders of my son, Parsa, who by all indications has all the right stuff and vision to become a successful person in his career and fulfill his father’s dream. I have thus far failed to convince wealthy Iranian expatriates to come together and combine their resources and make this dream a reality for all of us rather than donating individually millions of dollars to various established institutions in exchange for name recognition on some brick and mortar structure. I still believe in order for us to make a difference and contribute positively to this great land, the United States, we need to have our own independent institution of higher learning.

I salute my friend and talented architect, Mr. Bahram Badiyi, who spent many volunteer hours drawing the basic plans of such an institution and making its three-dimensional model. I hope that someday we will be able to use his architectural concept to make this dream a reality. If the Vanderbilts, the Mellons, the Chapmans, the Skirballs, the Stanfords, and hundreds of other visionary Americans could do it, there is no reason that why we Iranian-Americans can not follow their examples.

I have come to the end of my formal presentation. I am once again tempted to reminisce at some length about those early days—my big dreams and the steps I have taken to achieve them. But I would be remiss if I did not take this moment to salute those scholars, authors, editors, designers, and artists who have devoted so much time and talent to the progress of my company since 1980. At last count, I have been honored to be able to publish the works of 390 au-



thors and scholars. The list is growing constantly. I wish I could invite every one of them to be here this evening and share this moment of gratitude with me. Those of you who happen to be attending this year's MESA conference, I personally salute you here.

A few of my authors and colleagues have already departed us. I mention their names and cherish their memories. They are: Dr. Estelle Whelan, former editor of the Encyclopedia Iranica, Leonrado Alishan, Sadeq Chubak, Peter Avery, James J. Reid, Shapur Shahbazi, Jay and Sumi Gluck, Ezat O. Negahban, M. A. Jazayeri, F. R. C. Bagley, Mary Boyce, Ardeshir Mohasses, and Amnon Netzer.

There are a few individuals whose support to me has gone far beyond any of my wildest expectations. I would like to call their names and ask them to come forward and be recognized:

1- Professor Robert Olson.

2- Professor M R Ghanoonparvar.



Prof. Robert Olson accepting a lifetime achievement award.



Prof. M. R. Ghanoonparvar is being recognized for his outstanding scholarly contributions to the press.

3-Professor Abbas Daneshvari.

Finally, no independent and specialized publishing house could manage to thrive if it weren't for the help and financial contributions of various charitable organizations and foundations. I would like to mention the names of such donors in no order of preference. They include the Getty Trust in Los Angeles; Ilex Foundation in Boston; The Nazarian Foundation, New Jersey; Toufayan Fund, New Jersey; Hovannesian Fund, Chicago; Didizian Fund, London; Medical Pharmacies Group, Toronto; National Association for Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR), Boston; Armenian Studies Center of Columbia University, New York; Zohrab Foundation; Parsa Community Foundation; and Ahmed Foundation for Kurdish Studies.

And then there are individual contributors too numerous to mention here. But one couple's donations in the past decade has been truly outstanding



Mr. and Mrs. Oskouy are presented with an award in recognition for their charitable contributions.

and gone beyond anyone's expectation. Their charitable contribution to the Iranica Institute and various publication projects deserves a special recognition. I would like to ask Mr. and Mrs. Rasoul and Afsaneh Oskouy to come forward and be recognized and accept this plaque on behalf of the Iranica Institute as well as Mazda Publishers.

In closing, as I look back with pride, I must also take this occasion to look forward. Together, we shall continue to publish for many more years to come, making this press one of the finest among its peers.