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Lamorinda Realtor's Long Journey Home

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Jafarzadeh was suffocating, like breathing in a steam bath. She had to leave — the war, the oppression, him.

She and her boss at the travel agency concocted an escape plan. He assigned Jafarzadeh to lead a pilgrimage into Syria. But, in order to leave the country, she needed permission from her fiancé, or her father, any male authority figure. The boss called her dad, and after much weeping and gnashing of teeth, he agreed to sign her travel document. She had pleaded that she needed the money.

Off to Damascus. "All of those women... they all wanted to set me up with their sons."

She left the hotel in Syria and rushed to the U.S. Embassy, seeking a temporary student visa. Other applicants chided her. "You only have \$500? No English? You're wasting your time." An official stormed into the lobby. Let her alone! She grabbed Jafarzadeh, dragged her into her office. They held hands and cried as Jafarzadeh told her story. Maybe I can find a sponsor for you, the official said. Can you stay here two months?

It was a miserable two months, sneaking from hotel to hotel. But the official found a sponsor. A church in Oklahoma agreed to sponsor Jafarzadeh as an international student. She would do volunteer work for the church in return.

"Oh, boy. Now I'll have to commit to some other religion. But, if that's what it takes..."

She was broke. She had nobody. She knew no English. "But at least I'm not married."

The church fed her and provided a place to sleep, yet she despised it. She resented having to do what the church expected. But she avoided expulsion; she crawled out the window of her dorm and escaped.

An Afghan man gave her a job mopping the floor at a Walgreens and he let her sleep on a mattress in the back room of the store. She met a guy and dated him for six months, until she found out he was married, with kids. His wife warned Jafarzadeh: He'll do the same thing to you.

"So this is what they mean by a free country?"

The guy stalked her. The church turned her in. Immigration was after her. She fled to California, where there were more Iranians. Jafarzadeh arrived in Walnut Creek in 1999, got a job at a cafe in Oakland, saved her money.

And she applied for asylum. A volunteer immigration translator helped her at the court. You need to tell me your story, he said. "No, I only have to tell my lawyer. Not you."

The volunteer was her future husband.

At her hearing the San Francisco judge told Jafarzadeh to raise her head. "I want you to be proud of yourself. Be proud that you reached this level. You are serving this country and we need people like you. I am going to grant this," he said.

She enrolled at DVC, worked finance jobs, married the translator. More courts. Prove to me that this marriage is legitimate, said the judge, wary of a fraudulent reach for citizenship.

"What evidence do you need? Pictures? Movies?" Defiance with a smile.

Jafarzadeh lives in Moraga with her husband and 7-year old son, and has poured her passion and drive into a 13-year real estate career, at Lafayette Sotheby's since April 2015. "I love to find people a home where they can feel safe, loved, free...and enjoy a community that will respect them," she said. Sometimes she has trouble identifying with those who complain about things like the area traffic, or the property taxes. "I can't share that with them. They have no idea..."

She still has flashbacks, as on one of her first dates in San Francisco. Her fiancé promised a surprise, which as a rule she dislikes. Into the city they drove, she heard the roar, she saw the planes approach, lower...closer. "No! Not here too!" She fainted. But they were not bombing her grade school in Iran. They were the Blue Angels.

Jafarzadeh believes in a strong community, and especially in education. She believes that the best investment people can make is in their own children.

"If as parents we try to raise independent critical thinkers by supporting their questions and refer them to books and research, and respect their choices even if they are different than ours, maybe the next generation will not experience the chaos and war that is going on around the world now," she said.

The chaos and war of which she has many memories that she tries hard to forget.

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*per Public Records

High School Girls' Rugby

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Club coach Rob Lowe, whose seventh-grade daughter Rachel has played for two years on the Orinda Intermediate School rugby team, noted that women's rugby is the newest NCAA varsity sport, so colleges can now offer rugby scholarships.

A student asked about the injury risk. "The coaches teach you how to tackle, and how to do it right," Katzman said. Kat Clark, a senior at UC Berkeley and vice president of the Women's Rugby Club, said she suffered more injuries playing softball than playing rugby.

"But one of the biggest pleasures was how the sport provided me a great social network," Clark

said. Along that social line, club president Drew Pearson told the group that after each match, the two opposing teams meet on the pitch - the rugby field - and share a meal together.

Club officials stressed that the sport is open to high school girls of every shape and size, with no experience necessary. This summer, the league will field a team of seven players, and plans to introduce a 15-player team this fall.

Practices run through July 21, at the Pat Vincent Field at Saint Mary's College, from 7:15 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays and from 6 to 7:15 p.m. Thursdays.

Lamorinda Community Court

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The Orinda City Council was the first one to approve the concept last December. Then on April 14, the Moraga Town Council approved its participation in it. Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen confirmed that Lafayette will participate in the program, and that the agreement with the D.A.'s office about the guidelines of the program will be signed in the near future.

Christensen said he thinks that

the program will have some benefits for the community and will piggy-back well on the Lafayette current diversion program that is used for juvenile offenders in the community. He said that the cases that Lafayette will be sending to that new court are nuisance style of crimes that have been vetted through the Lafayette process. He also said that convicted criminals will not be eligible for the program.

Lafayette

More Meters ... continued from page A3

The POC is also looking at longer term solutions to manage parking better — including installing smart meters and parking pucks in the street and have the city enter into partnership with the private sector to increase the supply of public parking. According to its research and occupancy studies, the city already has a significant amount of parking, the problem is where it's located, how accessible it is and how it is regulated or restricted. Other options on the table are ways to incentivize property owners to connect rear parking lots, opening

them up to easier public access.

The current substantial city-imposed in-lieu fee, a whopping \$36,900 per parking space in the downtown core, going down to \$19,200 in the east and west ends of town, is being examined. The owner of a parcel who is unable to provide all of the off-street parking required by city code is responsible for in-lieu fees. These amounts represent the actual cost of purchasing land and constructing one parking space, and the POC recommends restructuring this fee so that it is more predictable and fair.

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