Happy birthday to me

On June 5th 1968 Robert Kennedy was assassinated, and on June 8th Martin Luter King was killed. Few weeks later Intel Corporation was formed and before thanksgiving that year NASA’s first manned mission, Apollo 7 was launched. In June of 1968 when I was born half a world away in Tehran/Iran my native culture could not have been more removed from the civil rights movement, American politics, or high technology if not for the family of educators that I was born in. But as changing times would have it, political upheaval, advances in technology, and globalization are the biggest influences in the life I live today.

The restrictions that my parents worked under as teachers were only lifted at home so my siblings and I were the beneficiaries of their unbridled teachings. Long before the notion of political correctness, cultural sensitivity, or women’s rights my mother taught us to think, formulate individual opinions about various subjects, and be prepare to defend them in debates. I could get away in school by choosing simple writing subjects about summer holiday or trip to the grandma’s. But at home I had to write about value of time and definition of learning. I even remember writing about how my brother, sister, and I should divide our inheritance. This way they made sure that we had a chance to decide on our own what is right and what is wrong before the prevailing culture had a chance to teach us the norms. To this day my dislike of ethnic jokes is rooted in my mother’s “Why is that funny?” question for which I didn’t have an answer.

We got a TV after most other people in the neighborhood but our prized position was a shortwave transistor radio that brought BBC, VOA and Radio Israel into our house. Listening to reports from faraway places was never a bewildering concept but having to limit discussions of these reports to our home was. Similarly reconciliation those reports with local sources proved to be eye opening. But some subjects like Clay’s boxing matches, Iranian weightlifters in the Olympic, President Nixon’s trip to China, and the frequent references to the moon landing broke the mold which allowed conversations outside the house. I still remember having to struggle with the various national anthems. My friends and I certainly didn’t understand them but if they were anything similar to the national anthem that we sang every morning in school then you could see the confusion. Without knowing it and in or own way we were struggling with concepts as large as nationality, loyalty, and even religion. My little sister even wrote about how advantageous it is for an American girl whose astronaut dad could read her prayers on the moon!

My generation had to memorize the multiplication table, use the abacus, and learn the calculator not to any great advantage. I always felt unprepared. There was always more to learn. A lot of changes were happening all at the same time. Children still followed their parent’s profession but this practice was becoming questionable more frequently. It was not uncommon for sons to sell the farm or the house that they had inherited to buy a bus or a truck. Driving was defiantly a more prestigious position then subsistence farming. However such shortcuts in modernity neglected to consider that a farmer can recover from a bad harvest if he still has the land to work on but a driver has nothing to fall back on if he loses his bus or truck in an accident. Hundreds of little mistakes like these, details of which is but a diversion from the current subject, collectively provided the atmosphere that eventually lead to the revolution in Iran and my migration to the U.S.

Political violence that cost the life of King and Kennedy were not the first and their destabilizing effects changes millions of people’s lives every day. The globalization that made Clay’s name change relevant to me as a school boy in Iran makes the collapse of garment factory in Bangladesh relevant to me as an American consumer. And the technology that made Intel a household name allows me to finally peruse the love of education that revolution and immigration had delayed.

The irony of reflecting on my life for this assignment on my 45th birthday aside I believe the aforementioned world events are token representations of their kind and their influences so vast that it gave me a new culture al together. If influence and change refer to something that is fundamentally the same but modified then my cultural evolution has been a paradigm shift. I am neither happy nor sad as I reflect. Consistent with all that is organic and real in life these forces have advantages and disadvantages. Gaining my current American worldwide perspective at the cost of never having a chance to grow into a complete Iranian is a comparison of apples and oranges.

*Eleanor Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and the Election of 1960: A Project of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers*, ed. by Allida Black, June Hopkins, John Sears, Christopher Alhambra, Mary Jo Binker, Christopher Brick, John S. Emrich, Eugenia Gusev, Kristen E. Gwinn, and Bryan D. Peery (Columbia, S.C.: Model Editions Partnership, 2003). Electronic version based on unpublished letters. <http://adh.sc.edu> [Accessed June 10, 2013].

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Homer Bigarts, ‘‘Leaders at Rites,’’ New York Times, 10 April 1968. <http://archives.ubalt.edu/bsr/articles/april%209.pdf>

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