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Worth Their Salt Too

Colleen Whitley

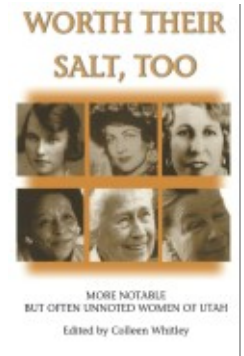
Published by Utah State University Press

Whitley, Colleen.

Worth Their Salt Too: More Notable But Often Unnoted Women of Utah.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2000.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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VERLA GEAN MILLER FARMANFARMAIAN
 How a Beekeeper's Daughter Became
 a Persian Princess

Judy Dykman

Judy Dykman recently retired after thirty years of teaching world geography and Utah history at Salt Lake City's Churchill Junior High. Her extraordinary abilities were consistently appreciated by students and parents. Churchill's staff and administration, Granite School District, and the Utah State Historical Society all recognized her as an outstanding teacher. Co-author of The Silver Queen: Her Royal Highness Suzanne Bransford Emery Holmes Delitch Engalitcheff, she earned her bachelor's degree in history from Weber State University and her master's degree in history education from Brigham Young University. She knew of Gean FarmanFarmaian as an outstanding teacher, but when she actually met Gean, she was impressed with her knowledge of and tolerance for people from all parts of the world. The more she became acquainted with Gean, the more Dykman knew her story needed to be told.

At least once in every young girl's life she fantasizes about becoming a real-live Cinderella, and for some it comes true. About five hundred American women married royalty during the Gilded Age.¹ After World War II the number of royal matches dropped significantly, but a few Americans still took the plunge: Lisa Halliday became Jordan's Queen Noor; Grace Kelly became Monaco's Princess Grace; and Rita Hayworth married an Arab sheikh, Ali Khan. Two Utah women also became royalty: Susanna Egera Bransford, Utah's Silver Queen, became

Princess Engalitcheff; and Verla Gean Miller became Princess Verla Gean FarmanFarmaian of Iran.

Gean was born on 20 April 1920, the oldest of five children, to Clarice Stockdale and Raymond Nephi Miller of Smithfield, Utah. In many ways her parents were typical residents of the area. Both came from large farming families, had a strong work ethic, valued education, and were members of the Mormon Church.² However, the Millers were affluent and could offer their children more opportunities.³ By contrast, the Stockdales had less, and only six of their nine children reached adulthood. Clarice was an adored child and the only girl to reach maturity. Because she was needed at home, her father didn't feel she needed more than an elementary school education. This decision devastated her as she was bright, musical, and dreamed of someday becoming a teacher. Desperate for a change, she begged permission to finish high school and attend college. Eventually her father relented, permitting her to enroll in Logan's Brigham Young College, which was a high school-junior college at that time. His one stipulation was that she wouldn't date as she was only fifteen years old.⁴

Ray and Clarice met during their freshman year and fell in love, but mindful of her promise to her father, waited seven years to marry. Clarice met her goal and earned a certificate of completion. Working with the family's beekeeping business kept Ray busy late into the fall and took him out of school early each spring. Despite these handicaps, he was still an active debater and an excellent student. For a time, the young couple lived in Preston, Idaho, where Ray had several jobs, one at the sugar beet factory. Ray's father persuaded him to return to the family's bee business soon after Gean, their oldest child, was born. The business offered more financial stability, even if they as beekeepers were continually on the move establishing and tending bee colonies. Ray's first assignment was to live in Rexburg, Idaho, for four years; then there was a season in Colton, California, before he and his family returned to Utah to live in Fillmore and Salt Lake City. When Gean was old enough to attend junior high, the Millers settled on Salt Lake City's State Street, having moved at least seven or eight times during the first twelve years of her life.

Moving frequently was physically draining and wreaked havoc with school work and records, but it offered many opportunities to meet people from differing cultural backgrounds. Because Mormon

wards weren't always available, Gean frequently attended services in other churches and quickly learned tolerance for new ideas. Through all of the moves, Clarice encouraged her children to study and improve themselves. She was pleased to see Gean become an avid reader very young. Gean also showed an early aptitude for music, dance, and dramatics, so Clarice set time aside to teach her piano, beginning when she turned seven. As their busy schedules became more hectic, mother and daughter often got up at 6 A.M. so Gean could have some uninterrupted time at the piano. While Gean practiced, Clarice ironed or did handwork. Ray also helped by packing the heavy, old, upright piano with them each place they moved. It would have been easier to leave it behind, but neither Gean or Clarice would consider that option.

When Gean turned sixteen, her family moved into East High's boundaries. This thrilled her because East High School offered many music and drama programs with which Gean became involved. She had progressed beyond her mother's ability to teach her piano, so she took lessons from Rose B. Lewis. At first Gean was just one of many students to perform in the Lewis piano recitals, but after several programs, she was featured in her own recital. Following this successful performance, Rose encouraged Gean to begin teaching piano lessons.

Her life was a whirl of activities. Then one day an incident occurred that dramatically influenced her decisions about a future career. She startled her parents by complaining of agonizing side pains and feeling faint. The family doctor, Dr. Grosbeck, diagnosed the problem as a ruptured appendix which was almost always fatal in the 1930s. However, he urged Clarice to try a technique he had developed to keep the poison from spreading throughout the abdomen: alternating hot and cold packs over a forty-eight-hour period. He hoped the unorthodox treatment would dramatically reduce the inflammation and swelling so the needed surgery could succeed. Fortunately for Gean, he was right; the appendectomy at LDS Hospital was successful.

While she convalesced, Gean had several conversations with Dr. Grosbeck about her future goals. Women had few career options during the 1930s and 1940s; generally they were nurses, teachers, or housewives. Gean had seriously considered enrolling in nursing school or working with the mentally handicapped after college, but he advised her that she was too emotional and too deeply involved with others to be successful in nursing. When she later discussed this with her

mother, Clarice agreed with him and persuaded her to consider teaching instead, a career Clarice had dreamed of following.

When Gean graduated from high school in 1937 at seventeen, the Millers informed her that as much as they wanted to help, she would have to put herself through college. They encouraged her to live at home and attend the University of Utah. To raise tuition and book money, Gean immediately started giving piano lessons for 25¢ an hour. Working long hours, attending classes, and studying left little time to socialize, but she managed to date occasionally, and a few men she knew would one day be prominent in Utah. Land developer Verden Bettilyon and KSL radio announcer Rex Campbell took her to the theater, dances at the Old Mill, and picnicked with her at Saltair resort. However, money problems not only ruled out sorority life but forced her to drop out of school the next year. Hoping to make sufficient income to return to school the following year, she added twenty new students and raised the price of her piano lessons. Despite the Depression, few of her pupils changed teachers. Most parents were satisfied and admired her efforts to put herself through the university. In the fall of 1939 she returned to the University of Utah, and she graduated with high honors three years later, with a major in education and a double minor in music and speech.

Despite her scholastic honors, getting a teaching position in Salt Lake City during World War II was difficult. While she looked for work, Gean served as a Girl Scout counselor at Camp Cloud Rim above Park City. The work ended in September, but she thoroughly enjoyed her experience and made many new friends. Finally, a fifth grade position opened in Cedar City. Life was certainly different in the small, southern Utah farming community. Gean was surprised to find the school's principal, Mr. Hulet, was also one of the school's sixth grade teachers. There was no school lunch, nor a cafeteria or kitchen to prepare the food. For the few students who needed a hot lunch, the lady teachers took turns bringing casseroles from home. The school also had no music, drama, speech, or dance programs. When Gean checked to see who was using the school's old, upright piano, she discovered she was the only one who knew how to play it. Determined to add music to the school's curriculum, she volunteered to come one hour before school a few days each week to conduct a group sing-along. At first only a few students attended, but as word spread, the number of participants

rapidly increased. Soon many of the student body were involved in the early morning singing.

Gean also saw a need for local plays and musicals for the school and community. Her fifth grade class put on Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, creating all the sets and costumes. Working with her church, she played Esther in one production and directed several others. An active Mormon, she also taught seminary and played the piano for Sunday services. Learning of her talents, Mr. Barlow, Iron County school superintendent, offered Gean a summer scholarship to a BYU music program. Thankfully accepting, Gean registered for a program directed by Lila Belle Pitts from Columbia's Teacher's College in New York City. The scholarship included board and room in one of the school's dorms, so Gean roomed with students from many parts of the world. During that eventful summer, the group shared many ideas about their differing cultures and values. Gean reveled in these experiences and, when the summer ended, she knew that returning to Cedar City would be a mistake. If she went back, she might not be able to leave again. She called Mr. Barlow to tell him about her decision. Understandably he was disappointed, but wished her well. Teachers from big cities seldom stayed long in small towns.

Clarice and Ray welcomed Gean home but knew it would be a short visit as she soon planned to leave again. She had taught U.S. history and geography as part of her fifth grade curriculum for three years but had never traveled east of the Rocky Mountains. Now she needed to see the eastern part of the U.S. so she would be better prepared to teach American history in the future. She announced her plans to go to Washington, D.C., and stay in the YWCA until she found work and an apartment. Her parents also knew she wanted to be near a former boyfriend, Ed Rosenberg, who was now working in D.C. for the War Department. Gean and Ed had similar interests, and the Millers felt it would be a good match if they decided to marry.

Gean applied for a sales clerk position at Jelleffs, one of Washington's most upscale ladies' accessory and lingerie stores, and was accepted. But within a few weeks she had mastered all the aspects of the new job and had visited all of the local sites including the entire Smithsonian Institution. She approached the store's personnel manager to ask for Wednesdays off and explained her reason for moving east. At this time, forty-hour weeks didn't exist, but the manager was

impressed by her ambitious goal to improve her knowledge of American history and geography and granted her request. Over the next several months, starting at dawn each Wednesday morning and ending in the wee hours, Gean used the bus to travel to the surrounding states. Her travels ranged from Pennsylvania to Alabama, where she visited Revolutionary and Civil War battle sites, historic homes, museums, national parks, and everything in between. She found each new city and state very different from the large western expanses she was accustomed to and enjoyed the contrast.

On one of her trips into the southern states, Gean witnessed the ugliness of racial discrimination firsthand. She bristled at the injustice of separate drinking fountains, restrooms, and cafeteria seating. As she entered a crowded bus in one of the South's big cities, she noted that all of the Blacks stood or sat at the rear while the Whites sat at the front of the bus. The situation sickened her so she marched to the back of the bus and sat with the Blacks. Hesitantly, the bus driver approached her and invited her to sit in the proper section. She refused and said she was comfortable where she was. The driver repeated his request and Gean repeated her refusal. Neither would give in until a little Black woman leaned over to Gean and politely said, "Ah 'preciates what ya-all is tryin' to do, dear, but ah've got to get to mah wuk—do what the man says." Gean was a little startled, but realized the woman was right, and moved. Her protest occurred several years before Rosa Parks made her historic stand, and while she didn't bring change, at least Gean knew she had recognized the injustice long before the Civil Rights movement brought it to general public attention.

Eight months later, Gean's romance with Ed ended; now it was time for another change. She bade good-bye to her roommate Margaret Hood, and in 1946 moved into New York City's YWCA for a few weeks. Almost immediately she started taking bus trips to the historic sites in that area. Her trips ranged into Maine and western New York. She also started searching the want ads of the *New York Times* for jobs. Working as a sales clerk had lost its charm, so she decided to apply as a governess. After growing up in a big family and teaching elementary school, she knew she qualified for that position.

One morning she ran across a simple ad: "Wanted, a governess, someone who loves children." It included a phone number, so she called for an appointment and an address. Used to the simple layout of streets

in Salt Lake City, she expected she could save cab fare and walk to the appointment. An hour later she discovered she was still some distance from the apartment house she was seeking; New York City isn't laid out on a grid system. She now faced a real dilemma: should she run the rest of the way and arrive windblown, or walk and arrive neat but late? She finally decided punctuality and dependability would make the best impression and started running. Several minutes later she arrived at the entrance of the apartment building. The impressive doorman took her up in the elevator to apartment 6A. When she was shown into the main hall, she was greeted by Mrs. Pathy, a small, beautiful woman. Pleased to find her instincts were correct about being punctual, Gean apologized for her breathless disarray and asked permission to tidy up for the interview. Mrs. Pathy was impressed by her integrity, punctuality, and credentials and hired her on the spot to work with her daughters, ages four and eight.

The Pathys were an amazing Hungarian family. Mrs. Pathy had an aristocratic education, spoke several languages, and possessed a generous heart. Mr. Pathy was a brilliant, international lawyer who had been a prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. He had come to New York City to earn a law degree at Columbia University so he could practice in the U.S. Prior to the war, he and his brothers had managed a shipping company, owned a farm in Egypt, and held the Coca Cola franchise in Egypt. When the hostilities started, he moved his family to the U.S. After the war ended, the Pathys were fortunate to still own most of their extensive holdings. These and several other lucrative investments had generated their wealth.

They traveled frequently, entertained in grand style, and wanted only the very best for their daughters. Gean was a little in awe of her new employers, but bonded with them and their daughters quickly. She was also pleased that Mrs. Pathy occasionally included her in her social circle even though she was now an employee. Once the girls were bedded down for the night, she was sometimes invited to join the parties, receptions, and dinners where scholars from many fields, well-known artists or writers, foreign statesmen, and musicians gathered. It proved easy to blend in with this new social setting. During the time Gean worked for them, the Pathys proved to be invaluable mentors and opened doors to rich, interesting experiences she would not have had otherwise. They took Gean with them to Europe twice and visited

Egypt on one of the trips. There she got her first real taste of life in the Middle East: she rode a camel, visited the pyramids, and spent time in Alexandria and Cairo.

Part of her duties included explaining the format of American schools so the Pathy family would understand the exclusive private schools the girls eventually attended. She took the girls to their swimming and horseback riding classes, gave them piano lessons, took them to parks and museums, and ushered them into all types of cultural activities. It was a stimulating life, but after both girls started attending school, Gean decided, with the Pathys' encouragement, to enroll at Columbia University's Teacher's College. This would fill her hours when the children didn't need her, give her a chance to attend stimulating lectures and plays, and would provide an opportunity to meet people. Her former music instructor at BYU, Lila Belle Pitts, was part of the school's graduate music education program. Gean immediately applied and started working on a master's degree.

One evening in early 1952, as she was taking the bus to Columbia's Teacher's College, she noticed a banner on the campus cathedral advertising T. S. Elliott's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was being performed there that night. Fascinated at seeing the play performed in an actual cathedral, she skipped class and purchased a ticket. Minutes after she took her seat, a tall, handsome gentleman took the seat next to her. During the intermission, they started to chat. Gean was pleased to see he was charming, articulate, and eager to get acquainted. Some might have been put off by a foreigner, but this only made Gean more interested in him. Through her early moves in life to her recent experience as a member of the International House at Columbia, she had learned to feel very comfortable with people from many different backgrounds. When the play ended, he offered to take her home. She refused, concerned that this might take him hours out of his way. In response he asked where she lived. When she told him she lived on Fifth Avenue between 94th and 95th Streets, he chuckled because he lived just half a block away! In the weeks and months that followed, Gean became very familiar with Prince Manucher FarmanFarmaian and met many of his family and friends. She also began to refer to him privately as Manu.

Mr. Pathy hadn't been concerned about Gean's social life as she had dated several men, but when he realized she was considering marriage, he had Interpol investigate him. He also invited the prince to

lunch on several occasions, chatting with him at length about his present situation in the U.S., his future plans, and his family. Since Manucher had been educated in French and English schools from an early age, he seemed very European in his outlook, dress, and mannerisms. Later Mr. Pathy took Gean aside and told her that a Muslim marriage would be challenging but that Manucher was a good man and was in love with her.

Gean was pleased that her Mormon background blended easily with his Middle Eastern origins. On her first visit to his apartment to meet his sister Leyla, who was studying at Barnard College, she noticed a long, framed picture of an enormous bed filled with weeping women. In the center of the row of women was a wreath with the words, "In memory of our beloved husband, Brigham Young." Startled, Gean immediately asked where he had found the picture. Manucher recounted how he had discovered it in a Paris flea market and had purchased it because it reminded him of his own family. Amused, Gean then told him that polygamy had played a major role in Utah's early history but was removed at the time of statehood. When Manucher explained that his father, a deposed Qajar prince, had eight wives and thirty-six children, his polygamous lifestyle didn't seem an unsettling foreign concept. She had absolute confidence that this charming Qajar prince loved her and would be a good husband and provider. It also didn't concern her at this point that he was not interested in having a family of his own. Like many women in love, she thought that time would change his mind. She realized that he and many of his brothers and sisters had little interest in having children because they had been raised in a harem among so many children. Manucher's mother was a warm, loving person but his father, Farman Farma, was much older and interpreted his family role differently. Concerned for each child's future welfare, he saw to it that all of the children, even the girls, were well cared for and received a good education. They were sent to colleges and universities in the U.S. and Europe and were urged to set high goals and excel. This farsighted vision eventually produced doctors, lawyers, scientists, social workers, bankers, and ambassadors who served capably in Iran, Europe, and the U.S.

Within three months of their first meeting, Manucher proposed and Gean agreed to marry him. Though they had known each other a short time, they felt they knew each other well enough to make the

commitment. As both were now in their thirties, neither needed to seek their parents' consent, so they made plans to have the three necessary ceremonies. On 26 May 1952 they had a civil ceremony in New York's City Hall and a Moslem ceremony conducted by D. A. Faisal. Two days later, at Mr. Pathy's insistence, they married in the Iranian Consulate so their marriage would be recognized without question when they moved to Iran. Following the many marriage ceremonies, the Pathys honored Gean and her prince with a large reception in a Park Avenue hotel. When the formalities concluded in New York City, the FarmanFarmaians left on an extensive honeymoon around the U.S.; Manucher had several brothers and sisters who lived in the U.S., and he wanted to introduce Gean to all of them. Some had married and had established themselves in occupations, while others were still in college. After several weeks they eventually arrived in Salt Lake City to meet Gean's family. The Millers were very excited to see Gean and to meet the man she had married. Her large extended family and many friends gathered in her parents' backyard for a garden reception, and members of the press attended to cover the event. Gean easily mingled with her old acquaintances and graciously introduced the prince, fielding all of her family and friends' questions. Would the couple live in the U.S. or would they return to Iran? Did Manucher plan to resume his former career as a government oil minister? Since the political situation in Iran was unclear at the time, the couple announced their plans were still in limbo.

A few months later, Manucher departed for Iran, and Gean continued to live in their apartment, taking classes for her master's degree. She kept in contact with the Pathys and worked for Blue Cross Blue Shield. Several months later Manucher mailed her boat and plane tickets. During his absence they had written constantly, but she yearned to rejoin him.

Traveling to Iran was not a simple matter in the 1950s. There were no direct flights into the Tehran airport from New York City. Gean first took a boat to Beirut and then flew to Iran. Though she had met many of his family in the U.S., she was not prepared for the large family gathering that awaited her in Tehran's airport. Many men, women, and children of all ages eagerly huddled at the gate waiting for her to deplane. Several of Manucher's siblings had also married foreigners, including some Americans. In a playful mood, Manucher decided to try to trick

her. Since he and his brother Aziz looked alike, they decided that Aziz would greet Gean with a big embrace and see if she realized something was amiss. It had been several months since Gean had been with Manucher, so the prank almost worked until she spotted him grinning in the background. Laughing, she eagerly made her way through the crowd to embrace Manucher and proved she really knew her own husband even though Aziz was convincing.

After spending a few days with his mother, Manucher took Gean to their apartment in the heart of Tehran. Because he had come to Iran ahead of her, he had found a lovely place and furnished it, hoping to ease her adjustment to life there. The six-room apartment was on the second floor of the building and had large windows that looked out onto a small terrace and a busy street. There was one bedroom and bath, a large tiled kitchen, a big dining room and living room, and an extra room that could have served as a library or music room. Within a few days, it was obvious that the large windows needed to be covered because they made the apartment too light and warm. Manucher and Gean had purchased a large black and white corduroy bedspread with a black dust ruffle for their bedroom before he left the U.S., so Gean found several yards of black corduroy material and fashioned some draperies.

Their new home had most of the conveniences she could have expected in New York City except that the water was tainted and the decor was different. It was safe to use the water from the faucet to bathe in, but drinking water or water to brush their teeth had to be purchased every morning from a little man who carried it into town from the mountains on his donkey. Like most of the upper class, the FarmanFarmaians had a houseboy to help with the housework and to fetch their water. Realizing that music was a vital part of her life, Manucher surprised Gean with an upright piano which she proudly displayed in their living room. They wanted a coffee table, so Manucher brought home two enormous glass bottles from the oil refinery and added a table top to make one. With a spark of impish fun, Gean put several gold fish in each bottle to amuse them and their company.

Gean soon felt at home in Iran; the semiarid climate was similar to that of Utah, mostly hot and dry but with cold spells and powdered snow in the winter. She was also pleasantly surprised to see that many families had beautiful gardens with many flowers and pools of water.

She soon learned that gardens reminded Muslims of paradise or heaven.⁵

But Gean also had to adjust to some of the difficulties the country was facing. The Iran Gean saw at that time was a victim and byproduct of its turbulent and colorful past. Despite the country's strong traditions and Islamic faith, in the past thirty years it had been forced to undergo many major, rapid changes against its will. Gean quickly learned that her husband and his family had been part of those changes and that they had adapted well, but many of the people were still reeling from their effects.

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and Iran, weak, divided, and with its finances in chaos, underwent a military coup. Then in 1925, the British government helped an aggressive military leader, Reza Shah, to seize power. His agenda was ambitious: to force Iran to Westernize and adopt many social, political, and economic changes. Using a strong army, he squelched the power of the minorities and tribal leaders. Reza Shah attacked and limited the power of the clergy, reorganized the economy by instituting taxes and developing a national banking system, drastically altered the government by introducing new commercial, penal, and civil codes, and established secularized courts. His government encouraged the cultivation of more staple crops and developed industries to produce more consumer goods and products for exportation. Railroad lines and roads to outlying areas were also started. Then, to protect his reforms and also ensure his control, the shah suppressed political parties, muzzled the press, and turned the local legislative body, the Majlis, into a rubber stamp.

Reza Shah's reforms also tore at the country's social fabric. Traditional and tribal dress were banned, and European headgear and clothing were stressed. In 1936 the chador, or black veil that completely covered women, was banned. Many people were scandalized as they felt the chador provided women protection and its removal defiled them.

When the Nazis marched into Russia in 1941, the British and Russians, anxious to protect the southern routes into the U.S.S.R. and to insure access to Iran's oil supplies, forced the shah to abdicate so they could replace him with someone they could easily manipulate. Reza was replaced by his young and inexperienced son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. Shy, quieter, and less confident than his father, the younger shah was much easier to control. Mohammed Shah tried to follow in his

father's footsteps as a great reformer but lacked his father's strength and decisiveness. During World War II, the presence of foreign troops in Iran was also politically, economically, and socially disruptive. Inflation, profiteering, shortages, and large-scale migration from villages to urban centers, coupled with crop failures, imposed severe hardship on the poorer classes. The humiliation of foreign occupation and interference fed political unrest.⁶

While these changes were occurring, Manucher had spent much of his young life in England, earning a degree in petroleum engineering. When he returned to Iran in the late 1940s, he worked as Iran's director general of petroleum concessions and mines. He watched as Mohammed Reza Shah tried to continue his father's progressive reforms. The shah and his Egyptian queen opened hospitals and built schools, roads, and irrigation projects to help the people, but Manucher was disappointed to realize that the young monarch was a weak leader. While some of the people welcomed the Westernization, many feared it and rebelled against the shah's efforts. Unable or unwilling to communicate with his ministers, he alienated some by holding lavish entertainments while many of his people lacked the necessities. He even imported European foods and beverages for his parties instead of patronizing local merchants. In some cases he seemed to openly defy the Koran when he sided against the clergy.⁷

As resentment toward the British and their control of Iran's oil industry increased in the early 1950s, many in the government pushed to nationalize Iran's oil industry. One of the major proponents of nationalism was Manucher's first cousin, Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq, who became prime minister in 1951. Dr. Mossadeq was the first Iranian prime minister to be chosen by the people through their Majlis, or legislature, instead of simply being the shah's candidate. Manucher opposed nationalization at that time because he realized it would impact the country's entire economy, not just the oil industry, and could do much damage. After nationalization took place and the British left, Manucher was disappointed when Mossadeq removed him from office for appearing pro-British. Later, Manucher approached the shah for a passport to attend an important oil conference in Venezuela because Mossadeq's office had rejected his request. The shah eagerly issued the passport and sent his guards to personally escort Manucher and two sisters to the plane. Following the conference, Manucher took

his younger sister, Leyla, to Barnard College in New York City. Then, instead of returning home, he decided to stay in the U.S., where he had always wanted to live for a few years. While he was living here, meeting and marrying Gean, Iran was facing still more changes.

The U.S. tried to mediate a compromise between the British, Mossadeq, a divided Iranian government, and the shah. Unable to work with this situation, the British and the Americans sponsored a coup to remove Mossadeq and his ministers and leave the shah in total control. As plans for the coup were being finalized, the shah fled the country. But with the American CIA's help, Mossadeq's administration was ousted, and the shah returned to sign the agreement.⁸

Gean arrived in 1954, several months after that coup, and she had an opportunity to see the effects of the agreement first hand. She felt empathy for the men and women who struggled in this changing world. Although the FarmanFarmaians were Muslim, many of the younger members of the family were shifting their practices to mesh with the new lifestyle. Some members of the family observed the five daily prayers and read from the Koran each day, while those who had been Westernized were less stringent in these practices. Some of the older women still wore the chador, but many of the younger women dressed in Western clothing, wore makeup, and became increasingly independent as they pursued careers. Many Muslims believe that collecting interest on money is wrong, so they oppose banking. Yet, as Iran modernized under the shah's leadership, its financial structure was Westernized, and several of Manucher's brothers contributed to the effort.

One of the first things that Gean discovered was that in Islam, Friday is the holiest day of the week, and most of Manucher's brothers and sisters ate their Friday meal at his mother's home. Manucher's mother, Batoul Khanoum, or Lady Batoul, invited them to eat many of their meals with her; she was an outstanding cook and personally supervised her helpers. The Persian seasonings, meats, and breads were very tasty, and being someone who enjoyed new experiences, Gean loved the cuisine. As the family arrived, they greeted each other as though they had not seen each other in years, with lots of hugs and kisses. Gean had studied a little Persian before leaving the U.S., but the course was too brief to teach her much. Thus, she found herself floundering when she tried to talk with her new mother-in-law. Eager to learn the language so she could better understand Iran, she started working with a tutor.

Manucher, sensing that Gean felt overwhelmed in this new world, carefully explained Islam and the Persian culture to her. He wanted her to see that despite some of the harsh elements of Islam, there was much beauty in it and in Iran.⁹

Gean found the Iranians very warm and welcoming, and she was often invited out. One afternoon, she observed her friends eating oranges and sat spellbound as they meticulously peeled them in various art forms: one a flower, another in concentric circles that turned into a spiral. On many occasions, she saw them eating pumpkin and sunflower seeds using only their teeth to delicately remove the hulls.

On Noh Ruz, the Persian New Year,¹⁰ Manucher took Gean to the provincial town of Kermanshah to visit his mother's Kurdish family and friends. She learned that Batoul Khanoum's family was considered nobility and was better educated and more affluent than most. They visited Manucher's favorite maternal uncle, and Gean posed in a Kurdish headdress and costume for a photograph. She soon discovered that the Kurds, like some Native Americans, wore their family wealth instead of depositing it in a bank. She was aghast when she tried the headdress on; the many coins sewn into it made it very heavy. Posing and holding her head up to smile for the photographer was no small feat. Manucher appreciated her efforts to wear the attractive, ornate costume, and the photo became a treasured memento. The visit was one of the ways he hoped to gently ease her into her new life in Iran.

During the months and years that followed, Gean was amazed at the influence Batoul Khanoum had in her daily life. Since many Persian women spent most of their time at home among their children or other women, traditionally they were not only under the supervision of their husbands, fathers, and sons but also the older females in the family. Mohammed Reza Shah and his father, Reza Shah, made every effort to give all women more opportunities, but even if the women wore Western clothing, old traditions died hard. Gean quickly realized that Batoul Khanoum was a sweet woman who had made up her mind to accept her foreign daughter-in-law and make her life as pleasant as possible. When she traveled to the market or went out to a village named Poonak, which the family still owned, Batoul Khanoum took Gean along. There Gean had a chance to see the charitable programs Batoul Khanoum had instituted to help the poor and watched her work with the village women as they made preserved vegetables and fruits. On

another occasion, Gean observed Batoul teaching her male cook how to read. Recognizing that few servants were literate, Batoul made every effort to help all of her staff. Batoul Khanoum also took Gean aside and encouraged her to find work outside the home so that she would feel useful and have something to do. She acknowledged that American women were accustomed to greater independence with fewer restrictions and told her this was acceptable. Her permission made it much easier for Gean when she eventually ventured out into the community on her own. Now she would not be criticized by conservative members of society when she taught several English classes at the Iran-America Society. One class that particularly amused her contained a number of young soldiers who leaped to their feet and smartly saluted when she entered the classroom.

Manucher, too, was adjusting to life in Iran under the shah. While he was living in the U.S., he had worked for the Voice of America, had written articles for *Petroleum Weekly* and *The Oil Forum*, and did a series of speaking engagements that took him all over the country discussing Iranian oil and politics. Now that he was married and had returned home, he deftly maneuvered through political minefields and developed contacts with men of vision and power. He was glad he had remained neutral when mob forces attempted to oust Mohammed Reza Shah in 1953. Now that the shah was back in power, Manucher found he was part of a group of young people who were regularly invited to join in sporting events, parties, and outings. Sometimes the events were entertaining, other times they were rather stiff, but to refuse was unthinkable.

Gean also participated in the shah's court and met Queen Soraya on numerous formal occasions. By now she felt at home in her adopted country and had gained an appreciation for Iran's literature and art. She observed that Persians from all social classes, even the very poor, entertained each other by reciting poetry such as Firdausi's *Shah Namah*, the great Persian epic, and the works of Hafiz, the greatest Persian poet of all. When Manucher was invited to dinners, receptions, or balls, Gean accompanied him and found the evenings stimulating.

After Gean had been in Iran for some time and had been involved in the Iran-America Society, the U.S. Point Four Program, and the American Women's Club, the American Embassy asked her to help lead the second annual Girl Scout camp on the shores of the Caspian Sea,

replacing the previous American director who had gone back to the States. Gean would be the co-director and would assist the Persian women and their American counterparts in organizing the event. Gean saw to it that each girl received a list of the clothes, footgear, toiletries, and crafts supplies they might need. To reassure the families that the girls, ages twelve to sixteen, would be safe, the government sent a contingent of armed soldiers to guard the camp. The soldiers were stationed around the perimeter of the camp and were given strict instructions to never face inward to watch the girls. The girls were also instructed to never approach the soldiers so that propriety could be maintained.

When she arrived in the camp, Gean was impressed by the location's beauty. She had visited the Caspian Sea on other occasions but had never been to that area. It sat at the base of a high, wooded mountain, with the Caspian Sea and its beaches stretching for miles. Gean and her Persian counterpart were amazed that several of the girls had not brought the sturdy shoes they were asked to bring. Instead of sensible, flat-heeled, walking shoes, they brought dainty, high-heeled sandals with bows. Regardless, the leaders made no changes in the day's itinerary and began hiking up the nearby mountain. About an hour later, the dainty party shoes began to fall apart, and the girls who wore them had to return to the camp under a leader's direction. The girls' painful experience vividly reminded everyone that there was a reason for the camp's dress code.

The last afternoon at camp, Queen Soraya visited to greet the girls and hear about their activities. She was impressed with the skills they had acquired during their hikes and crafts. Gean had a chance to visit with Queen Soraya, whom she had met previously, and they chatted informally. After the formalities ended, the queen visited with some of the girls, and during one conversation, she casually asked a girl how she liked democratic living. The girl paused, smiled, and said, "Well, it's interesting; you can clean the johns in the morning and meet the queen in the afternoon." Those nearby burst into laughter; it was not what they had expected to hear!

In the months that followed, Gean was invited to several of Queen Soraya's teas, and she was grateful her experiences at the Pathy parties prepared her for such events. During the next several months, Gean grew to admire the sweet, beautiful queen, but rigid etiquette defined

how closely they would become acquainted. Soraya was a caring person and was concerned for the welfare of Iran's women and children, and Gean was glad to be able to help in some of her charities. She played Chopin's *Fantasy Impromptu*, Opus 66 in C-sharp Minor, for a charity benefit the queen was hosting. On another occasion Soraya requested Gean travel to Zahedan as her representative and as part of the Iranian counterpart of the Red Cross. A flash flood had left the people homeless and desperate for food and medical supplies. Gean and the relief workers brought many useful supplies and some well-intentioned but inappropriate gifts from countries that wished to help but didn't understand Iran's climate. One country sent numerous pairs of rubber boots and another sent dainty layettes for the babies. Whatever the project, Gean enjoyed helping the queen with her charities and was saddened when Mohammed Reza Shah divorced the childless Soraya in 1957.¹¹

Nonetheless, Gean continued to try to adapt to life in Iran. One night, she danced with the shah at one of his dinner parties. He was charming and courteous but chided her when he discovered her limited Persian vocabulary. Later, she was pleased when several members of the party asked her to play the piano. A Western music lover, the shah was very complimentary when she played some Chopin and various American folk songs. Unfortunately, Gean's flamboyant spontaneity made the British ambassador's wife, who was a widely respected concert musician, feel uncomfortable. Gean gallantly offered to share the spotlight, but the lady declined, saying she played only classical music. Months later, the ambassador's wife invited the shah's court with Manucher and Gean to hear her perform.

There were other challenges for Gean and Manucher during the first years of their marriage as she was valiantly trying to learn about his life and fit in. In the male-dominated Iranian society where women played a subservient role, this was especially difficult. One weekend, thinking Gean would be impressed with his prowess as a great hunter, Manucher arranged to take her out into a remote part of Iran for an ibex hunt. The day was hot, the landscape barren. As far as the eye could see, there were no plants, animals, or even insects. When one lone ibex was spotted on a mountain top, Manucher took careful aim and shot it with great flourish. Gean wept. This waste of life was unconscionable. It had been the only living thing she had seen all day; how could he destroy it just for sport! Manucher stared in amazement. The numerous servants

he took along wildly cheered, and any Persian woman would have praised his marksmanship, making him the hero of the day. Obviously, despite their efforts, their cultural differences remained great.

Still, they had many bright moments. During a splendid excursion to the Caspian Sea with the shah's court, Gean seized an opportunity to permanently cement their relationship. The shah's staff had arranged an elegant dinner with music and lavish accommodations. The dinner had been dazzling, the dancing romantic, and the night sky was filled with millions of brilliant stars. Gean was wearing one of her particularly attractive gowns, and Manucher was dashing as always in his tuxedo. Manucher was also happy, as he had found satisfying involvement in the government. A friend, Dr. Amini, had recently helped him get appointed to the prestigious Oil Consortium Board. Sensing that this might be a good time to start a family, Gean worked out a plan to conceive a child that night. As both were in a particularly good mood, she skillfully managed to steer him away from the question that he always asked when they slept together: Had she taken the necessary precautions to prevent pregnancy? She clearly had not and was overjoyed when their romantic evening went as hoped. When two months passed, she knew she was pregnant. This would be the glue to bind them together and help them surmount all the challenges that routinely beset them.

Unaware that Persian custom dictated announcing a pregnancy to the husband first, Gean reacted as any American girl would. At one of the family's dinners, she waited until there was a lull in the conversation and all were together, then excitedly announced she was pregnant. Manucher froze, flabbergasted that he was going to be a father and that he was hearing about it for the first time. He quietly rose, took her by the hand, and led her out of the room. When she realized she had embarrassed him, she burst into tears.

Soon after that, Manucher took Gean to Persepolis, Shiraz, and Isfahan, the ancient architectural gems of Persia. She had talked of visiting these sites for months. The trip to the ancient Persian cities was wonderful. It was particularly meaningful to Gean because the great Persian poets, Sa'di and Hafiz, had lived in Shiraz. Following their return, Manucher gifted her with many little trinkets and then put her on the plane to Beirut. He had arranged for her to go home to her parents in Utah for their baby's birth. Gean wept as her plane taxied down the

airstrip and headed for America. She stayed with the Pathys in New York City until Manucher followed a few days later. He was to give some lectures on Iran and its oil for the Clark Getz's program. Together they flew to St. Louis where he was to address a large group of businessmen, and Gean took a bus to Salt Lake City.

Ray and Clarice Miller and all her family met Gean at Salt Lake City's bus depot. During the next several months, all of the Millers rallied around to give her moral support and show their love. Manucher arrived in Salt Lake City at Christmastime, and as he disembarked from the plane, he nonchalantly handed her a large, cord-bound box. Gean eagerly opened the box to discover an elegantly styled mink coat that extended to her calves. During his stay, Gean's friends, the Mackeys, presented him at an impressive dinner and reception at their home.

The following February, their little daughter, Batoul Roxane, arrived. She was a beautiful, healthy baby. She had her parents' intelligence and striking good looks, including her father's dark hair, eyes, and golden skin. Though Manucher was not on hand for the baby's birth, one of his brothers came through Salt Lake City and sent a large bouquet of roses. Another brother sent gifts for the baby and Gean. A local newspaper also covered the birth and published a picture of both princesses. From the minute she held the tiny bundle in her arms, Gean vowed that she would keep Manucher informed of Roxane's development. She sent photos and letters every few days. It seemed that each time Roxane smiled, Manucher received a new letter and photo. And from the moment the first picture arrived, he was mesmerized. She was the most beautiful baby he had ever seen! After five months of watching her grow and develop from afar, he sent Gean the tickets to return to Iran.

In her absence, Manucher had worked hard to ensure his position in the International Oil Consortium. The government of Iran had signed an agreement with eight international oil companies from Great Britain, France, the U.S., and the Netherlands. He found the Dutchmen particularly likeable and spent many evenings and weekends at their homes. By being careful in his dealings with the shah, with the other Iranians, and with the foreign members of the group, he had avoided political pitfalls. He also found it easier to be a part of the shah's court, but he was still vigilant. He could never forget that Reza Shah had been wary of the Qajar family ever since he had taken

the throne from them in 1925; the current shah was also suspicious. Because the Qajars had previously ruled and had lost properties and government jobs, the Pahlavis expected a backlash. Farman Farma and several of Manucher's brothers were imprisoned for minor offenses so they could not threaten Reza Shah's reform policies. One brother, Nosrat-Doleh, was even killed in one of Reza Shah's prisons because he had once been a candidate to be shah.¹² Now as Gean returned, things were more stable for the popular FarmanFarmaian family, but being a part of the government was still like taking a bumpy ride.

After returning to Iran, Gean resumed her duties of entertaining Manucher's business contacts, foreign dignitaries, and friends. Naturally a warm person, she enjoyed helping with entertainments and meeting people. Several months later, when Roxane was about fourteen months old, Manucher invited some members of the Oil Consortium to the FarmanFarmaian country home in Poonak. The home was surrounded by high walls, had a beautiful garden, and a nine-foot-deep swimming pool. Gean had finished dressing and had put Roxane in a frilly white frock. With Roxane and her Persian nanny nearby, Gean stooped to pick a flower or two to add to one of the floral arrangements. Looking up, she could not see Roxane anywhere. Panicked, she looked around her and suddenly realized the pool was close by. As the guests were arriving, Gean dashed to the pool and spotted Roxane floating deep in the water. Fully clothed, she dived into the pool and brought the baby to the edge. Turning the infant onto her stomach so the water could drain from her mouth and nose, she was relieved when Roxane spluttered and cried. Hearing Gean's calls, Manucher came running. He scolded the nanny severely for leaving the child's side. Gean dashed off to change clothes and repair the damage to her hair as he began to greet their guests. When the last guest left that evening, Gean, beyond exhaustion, burst into tears at nearly losing Roxane.

Despite their love for Roxane, Gean and Manucher's differences soon convinced them they couldn't live together. Gean offered him a divorce, but he declined saying they should separate instead. Under Muslim law, the man typically keeps the child; however, Manucher realized this would not only hurt Gean but would be harmful to Roxane. He loved the little girl but was not in a position to raise her himself. They agreed to part and for Gean to take Roxane with her.

Roxane was three when Gean arrived in Holland in 1958. She had taken a quick trip to the U.S. to visit her family but soon left, realizing Roxane would see more of her father if she lived somewhere in Europe. On her previous visits to Holland, Gean had met several women from the American Women's Club and the Dutch community. Now they warmly welcomed her as she settled among them. At this point, Gean still hoped she could make her marriage work even though she no longer lived in Iran. In the interim, she became very active in the American Women's Club and eventually became its president. Gean also found a teaching position in the American School and later in the American International School of the Hague in Holland. Still later, she became a principal. As promised, Manucher frequently stopped to check on Gean and Roxane. Though he didn't understand his beautiful American wife, he felt immensely proud of her. And as for Roxane, she was perfection personified!

Gean was concerned that Roxane have a happy childhood, balanced by two loving parents, contact with her grandparents, an excellent education, and good childhood companions. When Roxane became old enough to join the Girl Scouts, Gean became a troop leader. Eventually, Gean became head of the Girl Scout program in Holland and received the highest scout service award in 1964. She was also happy when Manucher flew Roxane to Iran every year so that she could stay close to his mother and her Iranian family. They were thrilled when Clarice made a visit to Holland in 1962 despite all the trouble she had getting a passport. Record keeping in her small Idaho hometown was inadequate, thus she had to find a relative, Moroni Heiner, to vouch for her identity before the U.S. State Department would issue the passport.

Since they were now living separate lives, Gean knew that Manucher had been seeing other women. However, it still came as a surprise when she learned that he had divorced her and taken a new wife in 1966. Under Islamic law, a man can have as many as four wives at one time, but polygamy didn't appeal to him. Gean heard that the new wife, Petronella Kahman, was Dutch, spoke French and Italian, and was very attractive, wealthy, and articulate. To his credit, during the coming decade, Manucher made every effort to include Roxane in his new family. Eventually, she became very close to her stepmother.

During the fifteen years Gean lived in Holland, she kept in touch with her Persian relatives and her family in Utah. Shortly after the divorce, Batoul Khanoum visited with a niece who spoke Persian and English to act as her interpreter. Gean was touched that this gentle, little woman had traveled so far to reassure her of the family's love. However, such kindnesses were common in their relationship, deeply bonding them together.

When Roxane turned eighteen and graduated from high school, Gean and Manucher were proud that she graduated with distinction. Her high school was small, affording her personalized instruction, but she was also a serious student. After living abroad for many years, she told her mother that she now wanted to attend college in the U.S. The European papers reported stories of escalating violence and crime in America nearly every day, so Gean was apprehensive and worried that America had become too dangerous in recent years. With this in mind, Roxane and Gean selected Mt. Holyoke College, a small but prestigious girl's school located in Massachusetts, not far from Smith and Amherst Colleges. This made it convenient for Roxane to take classes from those schools in addition to her courses at Mt. Holyoke. Two years later she was ready for another change. All of her classes and instructors were excellent, but she wanted to attend a co-ed school and meet more people. She enrolled at Princeton and graduated with honors two years later, with a degree in Middle Eastern studies.

Gean's life took another major turn when Roxane entered Mt. Holyoke. They had discussed whether she should take a teaching position and live nearby, but a college requirement settled the issue. All students were required to live on campus. Roxane found work to supplement the money her father sent for tuition, books, and living expenses. She was now eighteen, and it was time for her to be on her own. So, freed to pursue her own interests, Gean returned to Utah.

When Gean arrived in Salt Lake City, her mother, Clarice, eagerly greeted her. Her father had passed away by this time, but many of her family still lived in the area. After devoting so much time to Manucher and Roxane, she now had plenty of time to do volunteer work, take classes, and attend lectures and concerts. She found work and decided to seek a second master's degree at the University of Utah in educational systems and learning resources. During the years after her

divorce, Gean had many opportunities to remarry but wasn't interested. No one compared with Manucher.

By 1978, she had finished her second master's degree and was teaching in Salt Lake City's Wasatch Elementary. There she served as a pullout teacher for two years, helping students with special needs. She organized an early morning choral program again and sponsored special school performances. Later that year, she was thrilled when the principal offered her a contract to teach fifth grade.

Gean was also immensely proud of Roxane, who graduated from Princeton in 1977 and briefly worked at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., with the American Film Institute. Although her grandmother Batoul Khanoum had passed away in 1975, Roxane moved to Iran, anxious to spend more time with her father and to learn more about his country. She arrived just in time to witness the revolution that would overthrow Mohammed Reza Shah and bring Ayatollah Khomeini to power. At first she worked at an English language newspaper, the *Kayhan International*. When it closed during the revolution, she and two Persian editors from that paper founded a weekly publication called the *Iranian* that was recognized by the *Atlantic Monthly* for its excellence. Now her career as a serious journalist was assured.

Just as life was taking on some semblance of normalcy for Roxane and Gean in 1979, Manucher's life in Iran became more complicated. The shah and his family left, and Khomeini's supporters blacklisted the entire Qajar family to secure his position as an absolute ruler. For a while, Manucher and several of the FarmanFarmaian family who held prominent positions stayed in Iran. They had hoped to be useful to the new government, but soon most would flee to avoid imprisonment or death.¹³ To avoid detection, Manucher crossed the Iranian border into Turkey on foot and then was detained in Bulgaria for having a fake passport. After the Bulgarian secret police finished investigating him, their men moved him safely past Khomeini's spies in the French airport. Eventually Manucher reached Venezuela, where he had served as an Iranian ambassador and was given Venezuelan citizenship. Meanwhile, Roxane miraculously passed through the revolution safely but left in 1980 just the same. The greatest threat to her safety had not been being an American but being a member of the FarmanFarmaian family.

During the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, Gean continued to teach at Wasatch Elementary. From time to time, the local newspapers also featured stories about Utah's Persian princess.¹⁴ She gained a reputation for being an extremely caring teacher who worked wonders with the children she taught. Her Halloween costumes became legendary; the Columbus one was regarded as truly amazing. Her classes were creative as she sponsored plays and musical programs every year. Students who had long since moved on to high school and even college would drop by to say hello and received warm, sincere compliments and encouragement. Countless other students regularly invited her to high school and college graduations and weddings. Her memory for each face was phenomenal, and she could relate a story about each of them.¹⁵ Eventually, her school nominated her for Salt Lake District's Teacher of the Year Award, and a friend in the administration, George Henry, lobbied hard in her behalf with the selection committee. She didn't win the honor but was gratified to hear she was a finalist in the competition. A few years later in 1993, at the age of seventy-three, Gean retired after fifty years of teaching in the U.S., Holland, and Iran.

During these years she also stayed involved with the Middle East Center at the University of Utah, the Salt Lake Committee on Foreign Relations, the United Nations Association of Utah, the Utah Opera, Utah Symphony, and Pioneer Theater Guilds. Many of her Persian friends have found her upbeat and positive attitude about Iran particularly refreshing. In an era when many Americans are critical of it, Gean has many kind things to say about her adopted homeland. She also stays in touch with Manucher and frequently corresponds with other members of her Persian family.

Fifty-five years ago, few Las Vegas bookies would have taken bets that a beekeeper's daughter from Smithfield, Utah, would travel around the world, meet and marry royalty, and teach elementary school for more than fifty years. But if they had known Verla Gean, they might have reconsidered. She knows that life is often challenging but feels hers has always been rewarding. Through her efforts, countless children and adults gained self-esteem and learned about their countries and the beauties in the world around them. No teacher could ask for a more fitting compliment than to be remembered so fondly by so many. Along the way, she also found time to be a devoted parent and wife, caring sister and sister-in-law, and sympathetic friend.



Alberta Henry has spent fifty years working for minorities, children, the poor, and all the rest of us. Photo by Howard Moore, courtesy of the *Deseret News*.