

THE MAGAZINE FOR SAUDI ARAMCO RETIREES WORLDWIDE

PLEASANT DAYS FALL 2024

# Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah

الأيام الجميلة



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Joy Neumann, left, host of the 33rd Biennial Hafla, held Aug. 31-Sept. 2 near Dallas, Texas, embraces Amira Baluchi, from Dhahran. She attended with her husband, Ali, who has taken part in almost every reunion since the first one, in 1958. One-hundred-seventy-eight retirees, former employees, Brats and family members turned out to reacquaint and remember.



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### ***Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah***

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Retiree Tahir Bukhari and his son, Shaan, run in the Aramco Houston Half Marathon, which turned 20 this year. *AramcoWorld* is celebrating 75 years and Aramco Americas (formerly Aramco Services Company) is marking 50 years since moving to Houston.

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Wendy Levine captured special glimpses of the Kingdom on film when she stayed in Saudi Arabia with her parents, Marty and Rosemarye, in the early and mid-1980s. She shares some of her best storytelling shots.



**Cover:** Hafla 2024 evoked a kaleidoscope of smiles. Clockwise from top right: Diana Fenlon and her grandson, Finn G. Johnson; three happy camels; golfers Tahir Bukhari and Mike Haas (seated left and right) with fellow duffer John Triscritti; Delores Marshall and Rowie Welch; and dancers (from left) Christina and Dolph Todd and Catherine and Isaac Lewis.

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saudi aramco





# Smiles Galore AT REUNION '24

BY KYLE PAKKA



*“I feel like these reunions reconnect our souls.”*

**T**hat’s how Joy Neumann described the spirit of the 33rd Biennial Hafla, held Aug. 31-Sept. 2 at the Omni Las Colinas Hotel in Irving, Texas. The former Dhahran resident—who is both a Brat and the spouse of an annuitant—ought to know, for she organized the event, assisted by her husband, Peter, and a cohort of other indefatigable helpers.

For three days, an extended Aramco family of 178 retirees, former employees, Brats and family members, warmed by the twin suns of Ali Baluchi and his wife Amira, gathered under the blue Texas sky to share old memories and make new ones.

Spirits were high as the links that bind Aramcons

**Top, from left:** Frank and Judi Cortis and Lori Wentworth greet attendees like Jack and Ellen Meyer, (left) with great big smiles at the 33rd Biennial Hafla. The gatherings have been held since 1958—barring 2020 when COVID-19 put paid to the event.



**Above:** The reunion's "twin suns" of Ali and Amira Baluchi (seated center and right), are orbited, from left, by Rick Owen, reunion organizer Joy Neumann, Ann Sadler, Kathy and Krissy Owen, Randa Owen-Williams, Torr Dell'Oro, Seth Sharr and Tom Owen. **Left:** Jo Watts poses with the reunion logo she created.



The buzz continued to grow Friday night at social hour as more Aramcons arrived and the jangling bangles on the women's arms played golden music. After a dinner of pasta, roast chicken and salads, people lingered at their tables over coffee or drifted outside to sit under the party lights strung in the trees to reminisce deep into the night.

Saturday, the *suq* bustled as Aramcons marveled at David Jessich's collection of Saudi license plates and banknotes, tried on a *farwa* (a heavy woolen cloak), had their arms decorated with henna, picked up an *AramcoWorld*-branded coffee cup, and had Ali Baluchi inscribe a copy of his memoir, *Heart and Soul*.

Vanguard and Aramco Benefits dispensed tote bags and pens while answering questions and Aramco Americas distributed free copies of Aramco-centric books.

The table staffed by representatives of the newly formed Aramco Archive & Records Center proved popular.

Hiba Daldin, supervisor of the center, said it aims "to create a permanent home to preserve the company's history and celebrate its heritage." While handing out swag bags and discussing Aramco and Saudi artifacts, the center received a large box of pottery shards and a 1948 company brochure.

"The company's history is one of a kind," Daldin said, "and we want to tell the story of the people that helped build it." (See related story on page 22.)

After making a presentation Sunday on the center, Bill Walsh happily reported that Aramcons had approached him about donating

were tested and found to be strong, even though at the close of the reunion some clouds appeared on the horizon when news broke that AramcoExpats.com would go dark at the end of the year and that no volunteers had stepped up to organize the next biennial reunion. In the meantime, there was word that a merger with the Aramco Brats may be in the offing to keep the *hafla* caravan rolling.

You could feel the rising energy even before the reunion officially kicked off. As Aramcons began arriving Friday, Aug. 30, friends recognized each other and shouts of joy rang through the bright, open lobby with its restaurant overlooking the pool and Lake Carolyn.

"Your Aramco neighbors are your family. We see them to this day," commented Christina Todd, from Pensacola, Fla. She and her husband, Dolph, who trained Saudi helicopter pilots, lived in Ras Tanura from 1989-2009.

She looked with wonder at the growing crowd of Aramcons and a huge smile lit up her face.

"It's like we left yesterday. Aramco really is your extended family," she said.



a wedding dress from Tayif, a waterwheel, ancient stone tools, photographs, early ID cards and theater group playbills.

A slate of hands-on workshops and presentations Saturday drew a number of attendees. They included a collage workshop hosted by Joy Neumann and Kathy and Krissy Owen, a silk-painting class conducted by Jo Watts and a presentation on quilting by Patricia Smith.

All day, during the Tex-Mex dinner and then long into the night, people swapped stories about work, travel, and enduring friendships.

Seth Sharr, who in a 25-year career wore many hats, one as president of Aramco Services Company, recalled the pain of letting project managers go during the downturn in the global oil industry in the early 1980s.

“It was very moving because they only talked about the positives of having worked for Saudi Aramco,” he said. “They all said that if business picked up again to give them a call. A few years later, I had the opportunity to call a number of those people back.”

Sunday saw the golfers wrap up their two days of play on nearby courses. When the results were tallied, Ed Devlin, Steve Farley, Jeff Hancock, Ken Pitts, Mel Knotts and Gregg Skinner topped the list of players.

In addition, on Saturday, Brat Lori Wentworth provided a dazzling overview of tourism opportunities in the Kingdom and a Saudi Trivia Quiz provoked laughter amid a shower of prizes. David Jessich, a fixture at reunions for the last decade, gave a presentation on the colorful world of collecting Saudi license plates.

The stories never stopped. Sally Carson Campbell and her sister, Mary Carson, were born in Dhahran in the 1950s after their father, Lee, a petroleum engineer, arrived in 1948.

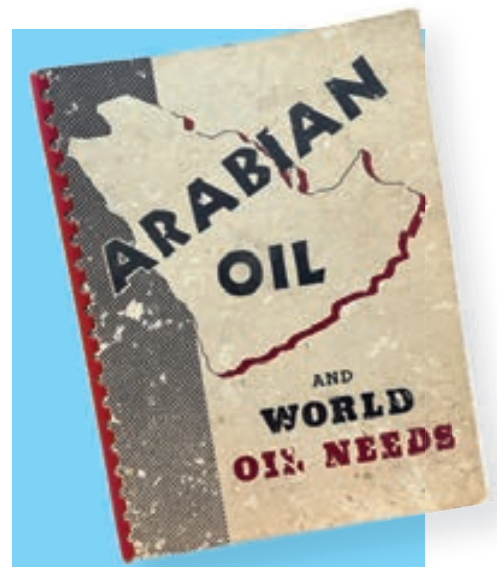
Their dad’s story is typical in one respect: “He first went over thinking he would stay two years,” Mary remembered. “Every two years, he would say



**Top:** Hiba Dialdin, chief of the new Aramco Archive & Records Center, speaks to a rapt audience during a Lebanese feast. **Right:** Gerald Bennett models a *farwa* at a reunion fashion show.



**Top, from left:** Reconnecting are Ivon Nostrand, Vicci Turner, Jane Archer, Allison Cook Taylor, Jary Archer, Adele Tavares, Oriol Carey and Bonnie Cook. **Bottom:** Janice Madsen, Bonnie App, Mark Nance, Wendy Cyr and Steve Guyon.



## TELL ARAMCO'S STORY

Do you have mementos or Saudi Arabian artifacts that you worry may not have a home someday? Consider donating items to the Aramco Archive & Records Center in Dhahran. It aims to gather, organize, preserve and centrally manage the company's historic assets and relevant records.

Email the center at [aarc@aramco.com](mailto:aarc@aramco.com) and learn more at [www.aramcolife.com/en/publications/the-arabian-sun/articles/2024/week-07/aramco-archive-memorabilia-faqs](http://www.aramcolife.com/en/publications/the-arabian-sun/articles/2024/week-07/aramco-archive-memorabilia-faqs).

'Oh, we'll just be here two more years.'" He retired in 1985.

During the Sunday night Lebanese feast, Hiba Daldin, a Brat herself, spoke about Aramco's vision to be the world's preeminent integrated energy and chemicals company, and provided an overview of the company's four strategic themes: upstream preeminence; downstream integration; lower-carbon initiatives; and localization.

The evening was memorable for thunder and rain and two unexpected announcements.

First, Vicci Turner tearfully revealed that after 22 years she could no longer



## HELP WANTED

If you are interested in helping with the 2026 Biennial Hafla, email Joy Neumann at [joyaneumann@hotmail.com](mailto:joyaneumann@hotmail.com) or Kathy Owen at [kathleenmowen@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenmowen@gmail.com). With the closing of the Aramco Expats website, Joy and Kathy have offered to create a master email address list to help ensure that everyone stays connected.



**From top:** Vicci Turner announced the closure of AramcoExpats.com, receiving a standing ovation for her 22-year project to keep Aramcons connected. Ali Baluchi discusses plans for the Expatriates Reunion in the Kingdom in 2027. John Triscritti hugs Joy Neumann and Karen Fallon as Peter Neumann looks on.

continue running the Aramco Expats website. Her news elicited a pronounced gasp from the audience, followed by a standing ovation for her dedication over the years to keep Aramcons connected.

That shock was followed by an announcement by Ali Baluchi, who has attended every reunion save one since the first one in 1958, urging the annuitant group on behalf of Aramco senior management to consider joining forces with the Brats to create one unified organization.

On the lighter side, Baluchi said the next KSA Reunion would be held in March or April 2027 (depending on when Ramadan falls). Joy Neumann received a gift to thank her for her hard work to organize the *hafla*, there were raffle prizes galore, and Kathy, Krissy and Chris Owen joyfully dashed around, doing a bit of everything to help out.

In a conversation during the *hafla*, Karen Hanson Fallon memorably summarized the Aramco experience: She arrived in Kingdom in 1953, finished ninth grade in Abqaiq, married her husband, Albert, who also grew up in Abqaiq, returned to Aramco and lived in Ras Tanura from 1978-1999.

“The first time we took a bus trip to Hofuf from Ras Tanura, we stopped in Abqaiq for breakfast at the dining hall,” she said, “The man behind the counter said ‘I know you from *bint*.’ My mouth dropped open: It’s like *you’re home*. That’s what these reunions are all about.”

She ought to know, for she and Albert, who died in 2023, hosted the Annuitants Reunion in Las Vegas in 2008.

Final photos and hugs all around marked Monday morning. The dog barked, the Aramco caravan, destination unknown, passed, but the spirit was alive in the calls of “*ma’salaama, inshallah*” ‘til next time.

*About the author: Kyle Pakka joined ASC Public Affairs in Houston in 2001 and transferred to Public Relations in Dhahran in 2003. He and his wife, Tina Pakka Cape, retired to Tucson, Ariz., in 2020. While at ASC, he attended the 2002 Annuitants Reunion in San Diego.*



## REUNION HISTORY (1958–2024)

| DATE           | ORGANIZERS                                    | VENUE                 | GUESTS |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|--------|
| Sept. 1, 1958  | Andy and Evelyn Anderson                      | Pleasanton, Calif.    | 147    |
| Sept. 2, 1960  | Step Stepney, Phil McConnel, Roy Lebkicher    | Santa Barbara, Calif. | 230    |
| Sept. 3, 1962  | Rol and Ruth Cundall                          | Santa Rosa, Calif.    | 265    |
| Oct. 4, 1964   | K.O. and Merle Feltman                        | Anaheim, Calif.       | 476    |
| Sept. 5, 1966  | Clark and Mary Cypher                         | Yosemite, Calif.      | 321    |
| Sept. 6, 1968  | Don and Mary Richards                         | Palm Springs, Calif.  | 417    |
| Oct. 7, 1970   | Barney and Bertha Robertson                   | Lake Tahoe, Calif.    | 385    |
| Oct. 8, 1972   | Warren and Myrl Hodges                        | Coronado, Calif.      | 575    |
| Oct. 9, 1974   | Jim and Darcie Felter                         | Scottsdale, Ariz.     | 587    |
| Nov. 10, 1976  | Don and Melda Wallace                         | Monterrey, Calif.     | 800    |
| Sept. 11, 1978 | Jim and Darcie Felter                         | Scottsdale, Ariz.     | 750    |
| Oct. 12, 1980  | Lori Burmester                                | Tarpon Springs, Fla.  | 690    |
| Nov. 13, 1982  | Milo Cumpston                                 | Afton, Okla.          | 441    |
| Oct. 14, 1984  | Ruth McClain                                  | Coronado, Calif.      | 861    |
| Oct. 15, 1986  | Art and Sally Taylor                          | Mt. Pocono, Penn.     | 825    |
| Oct. 16, 1988  | George and Nadine Trial                       | Osage, Beach, Mo.     | 665    |
| Oct. 17, 1990  | Bobby and Joan Alexander                      | Las Vegas, Nev.       | 1,272  |
| Sept. 18, 1992 | Merle and Curt Wideman                        | Pinehurst, N.C.       | 588    |
| Sept. 19, 1994 | Bob and Barbara Predmore                      | Scottsdale, Ariz.     | 900    |
| Sept. 20, 1996 | Roger and Peggy Ward                          | Kissimmee, Fla.       | 725    |
| Sept. 21, 1998 | Doug and Marjorie Rines                       | Scottsdale, Ariz.     | 550    |
| Sept. 22, 2000 | Fred and Sally Aslan                          | San Antonio, Tex.     | 815    |
| April 2000     | Ali and Anisah Baluchi                        | Dhahran, Saudi Arabia | 287    |
| Sept. 1, 2002  | Barbara Predmore and Curt Wideman             | San Diego, Calif.     | 655    |
| Aug. 29, 2004  | Curt and Merle Wideman                        | Pinehurst, N.C.       | 484    |
| May 29, 2006   | Tony and Judy Germani                         | Branson, Mo.          | 516    |
| Sept. 28, 2008 | Karen and Albert Fallon                       | Las Vegas, Nev.       | 1,006  |
| March 2009     | Ali Baluchi                                   | Dhahran, Saudi Arabia | 491    |
| Oct. 2, 2010   | Eva-Kinga Farnsworth                          | Orlando, Fl.          | 386    |
| Oct. 6, 2012   | Rick and Rianne Chimblo                       | Tucson, Az.           | 350    |
| Sept. 5, 2014  | Jim and Linda Shearon                         | Asheville, N.C.       | 350    |
| Oct. 25, 2016  | Rob and Christien Petrie                      | Monterey, Calif.      | 270    |
| Sept. 17, 2018 | David and Vicki Jessich/ Bill and Judy Walker | Austin, Tex.          | 416    |
| March 2019     | Ali Baluchi                                   | Dhahran, Saudi Arabia | 550    |
| Oct. 31, 2022  | Vicci Turner                                  | Caribbean Cruise      | 86     |
| March 2023     | Ali Baluchi                                   | Dhahran, Saudi Arabia | 405    |
| Aug. 31, 2024  | Joy Neumann                                   | Dallas, Tex.          | 178    |

# HAPPY HAFLA 2024!



David and Vicki Jessich



Becky and Ken Pitts



Ivy Tobey



**Yale and Dona Logan**



**Mike and Judy Butler**



**Diana and Denny Fenlon**



**Robert MacDonnell, Denis and Bill Roussel**



**Judy and Tony Germani**



**Shayne and Gregg Skinner**



**Sherry and Brett Abboud**



**Ann and Roy Sadler**



**Janice and Eric Madsen, Bonnie App**



**Tom and Perla Timony**



**Jim Milliken and Marta Ramos**



**Jill and Fred Killgore**



**Joe and Adri Bormans, Seth Sharr and Bonnie App**



**Wendy and Fraser Cameron**



**Frank and Judi Corts**



**Christina and Dolph Todd**



**Cleo and Al Hutchins**



**David and Debbie LaRue**



**Doug and Jacki Seifert, Hans Stockenberger**



Back: Delores Marshall, Vicci Turner, Rowie Welch; Front: Adele Tavares, Darice Tiffany



Melinda and Mark Swann



Ivon and Frank Nostrand



Catherine and Isaac Lewis



Jack and Ellen Meyer



Norman, Nicole and Corazon Naquin



Ali Baluchi, Karen Fallon, Amira Baluchi, Catherine Lewis



Sally Carson Campbell and Mary Carson



Victoria Fernando and Ed Dymicki



Mary Ann and Ed Laudien



Patricia and Norman Smith



Allison (Cook) Taylor and Bonnie Cook



Bill and Jane Argo



Mary O'Callahan, Hadeel Abuhamayel, Jennifer Simpson, Susan Husted-Long



Clara and Robert Batchelor



Waleed Dashash and Delores Marshall



Nabila and Tahir Bukhari



John Schlembach, Mike Perry



Kyle Pakka, Marti and Mel Knotts, Bonnie App, Seth Sharr, Judy and Tony Germani, Segundo and Alina Fernandez



**Khan and Yasmin Akmal**



**Julz and Tom Hall**



**Gaylynn and Mark Cowen**



**Carol and Wallace Colly**



**Lasher Lavenue and Eman Al Jaffar**



**Rick Owen, Randa Owen-Williams, Tom and Kathy Owen, Krissy Owen, Chris Owen**



**Steve Guyon**



**Alina and Segundo Fernandez**



**Ali and Amira Baluchi, Michele and Bruce Taylor**





Hadeel Abuhamayel, Hiba Dialdin, Joy Neumann, Mary O'Callaghan



Mike and Mickie Haas



Mel and Marti Knotts



Debra and Bob Lumpa



Jane and Jary Archer



Clay and Gerald Bennett



Oriel Carey, Nicole Naquin



# Tough Tuscan 'GOO' Can't Halt HARDY Aramco Walkers

WRITTEN AND  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
KYLE PAKKA





A cold spring rain had been falling steadily since before dawn and now, several hours into our day's walk, we were floundering uphill along the edge of a vineyard, through goopy, gloppy mud that threatened to suck our boots off. We stopped for a moment to catch our breath, the rain drumming down as we slowly sank in the squishy terra cotta-colored goo. We had hours and miles to go before reaching Gambassi Terme in north-central Italy. Why, we asked ourselves, are we doing this?

My wife, Tina, and I were slogging through the Tuscan mud because we love walking holidays. Backpackers in our youth, we have since logged more than 700 miles on rambles, mostly in the U.K., but also in Ireland, Japan and New Zealand. We relish the slow-travel ethos of a walking holiday that enables us to savor our surroundings.

Before modern high-speed travel—even before boat, carriage, horse or camel—people traveled on foot to reach the next village, to drive their livestock to market or to

make a pilgrimage to a sacred site. Today, the paths linking villages, old drover roads and pilgrimage routes are popular tracks for multi-day, inn-to-inn walking holidays.

When we started rambling in 1996, we arranged our own logistics and carried all our stuff in mid-sized backpacks. Once we had the financial means, after several years working in the Kingdom,

**Clockwise from bottom right, opposite page:**

Tina Pakka Cape smiles as *Under the Tuscan Sun* becomes *Through the Tuscan Mud*; the author finds that all roads, especially the Via Francigena, lead to Rome; a quintessential Tuscan side street in Siena; the towers of San Gimignano at twilight; San Miniato, the starting point for the walk; the walled medieval town of Monteriggioni; the Piazza del Campo in Siena.





**Clockwise from left:** Famous for the illuminated Gospels produced in the 8th century, the ruins of the Lindisfarne Priory date from the 12th century; wild garlic blooms alongside St. Cuthbert's Way near Jedburgh.

we started booking self-guided trips through companies that reserve accommodation, provide route maps and move bags between overnight stops. All we carry is a daypack.

We prepared for our trips by strapping on our boots and walking laps on the 3.5-mile path around the Rolling Hills Golf Course in Dhahran, watching for desert foxes and frequently saying hello to H.E. Ali I. Al-Naimi, who enjoyed walking the path. We also delighted in seeing the European bee-eaters that pass through Dhahran in the autumn and in early spring.

We saw those same bee-eaters in the skies of Tuscany this spring when we walked a 70-mile section of the Via Francigena that connects Canterbury, England, to Rome. Starting in San Miniato, Italy, we travelled along a mix of foot trails and country lanes through hilltop villages, olive groves and vineyards. As we walked, the deep, forested ravines of northern Tuscany gave way south of Siena to low rolling green hills and farmland. Spring was running riot—the grass lush and pathways lined with exuberant displays of wildflowers.

We stayed overnight in a succession of picturesque towns, heading south from San Miniato through Gambassi Terme, San Gimignano, Monteriggioni, Siena, Lucignano d'Arbia and ending in the walled village of Buonconvento. We were pleasantly surprised by Gambassi Terme, with its centuries'-old palazzos and churches strung along a narrow bluff, and knocked out by the walled medieval town of Monteriggioni, with its





**Clockwise from above:** Cessford Castle, scene of fighting in the Border Wars between Scotland and England, is peaceful now; the island of Lindisfarne is accessible only at low tide; ladder stiles allow walkers to climb over dry-stone walls; the Cheviot Hills offer breathtaking views of the countryside; gorse flanks the trail over the Eildon Hills near Melrose.

intact circular wall and 14 towers.

We were nervous of being disappointed by San Gimignano, a Tuscan tourist honeypot besieged by bus tours during the day. But by sunset the town was nearly deserted and hauntingly beautiful, its soaring brick towers looming into the violet sky and its little piazzas bathed in golden pools of light cast by electric lamps.

A great benefit of a walking holiday in Tuscany is that one can indulge in all the glories of Italian cuisine and the next day walk it off before indulging again.

Our time on the Via Francigena at an end after seven days of walking with a few rest days sprinkled in, we flew to Scotland, where Tina went to Edinburgh to visit old Aramco pal Seonaid MacDonald while I walked St. Cuthbert's Way from Melrose, Scotland, to the island of Lindisfarne in Northumbria, England. In 2022, I had walked the scenic middle section of Hadrian's Wall and was interested in doing another solo walk. The 60-mile St. Cuthbert's Way fit the bill.

The walk began at the ruins of the 12th-century Melrose Abbey and then climbed the Eildon Hills to the south, awash in the mustard yellow of blooming gorse. The trail follows the River Tweed east, past the ruins of Dryburgh Abbey, and then dips south to another abbey ruin in the lovely town of Jedburgh. From there, the trail traverses the wild open highlands of the Cheviot Hills where red kites, grouse and lapwings were busy flying over the purple heather. The path then descends to the coast, ending



at Lindisfarne, just offshore in the North Sea and accessible via causeway only at low tide.

In June of 793, the Vikings sacked the monastery at Lindisfarne in their first major attack on the British Isles. When I arrived late one afternoon in June, the Vikings were long gone, replaced by zombies! Director Danny Boyle was filming *28 Years Later*, the third installment of his apocalyptic zombie trilogy, and the film crew outnumbered residents of the village, population 160.

Home to the ruins of a 12th-century priory and a 16th-century castle, Lindisfarne feels otherworldly, rising like a phantom from the tidal flats, the castle on its rocky pinnacle visible miles away.

After my seventh day of walking, I arrived footsore in Lindisfarne and celebrated in a pub garden with the film crew. And the zombies.

Better than Vikings any day!





Frank Jessich in his office at Ras Tanura Refinery, 1956.



Elizabeth "Libby" Jessich, retired Aramco executive Ali Baluchi and Christopher Jessich at the CEO's Dinner during the 2019 Aramco Expatriates Reunion.

# PRIDE in Aramco across THREE Generations

By Richard Lockhart

When Christopher Jessich, a lead supply chain analyst in Procurement & Supply Chain Management's Business Ethics Group, was in high school in Edina, a suburb of Minneapolis, he told the girl he would eventually marry that at one point he would return to Saudi Arabia.

Jessich had lived in the Kingdom as a boy, and Saudi Arabia is where his father, David, and grandfathers forged their careers. Christopher's paternal grandfather, Frank, arrived in Dhahran in 1950 to work offshore as a mechanical engineer. His mother's father, George Ryan, arrived in 1968 to head Industrial Security.

"I think for my father's father, and my mother's father, it was the opportunity to accomplish something really significant: major, major projects," explains Christopher.

"My mother's father had quite a bit to do with creating the procedures within Industrial Security," he says. "In those days, you had American presidents and executives."

## Born in Dhahran

Christopher's father was born in Dhahran in 1953 and grew up there. He attended boarding school in Beirut and the U.S., before majoring in petroleum engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In 1972, he came back to Aramco as a fresh graduate, then

in 1976 married George Ryan's daughter, Isabelle Dothee, who had come to Saudi Arabia with her father. They were married in Belgium and drove back to the Kingdom in Isabelle's Volkswagen Beetle, breaking down on the way in Turkey.

"When my father joined the company, it was very different," says Christopher. "The culture, on so many levels, was so different. Hardships were different.

"I complained when I was young when the AC didn't work. My father says, 'When I was growing up, we didn't have AC.'"

In the late 1970s, David and Isabelle left Saudi Arabia as David studied for an MBA in Chicago, before working for Exxon in Louisiana (where Christopher was born in 1980) and Houston.

[Editor's note: The couple divorced in 1991 and David married Vicki Walters, an Aramco schoolteacher, in 1993.]

"My father always knew he was coming back," says Christopher. "There is a home factor. I



Frank Jessich (left) at Ras Tanura Refinery in the 1950s.



Frank Jessich and his wife Dymphnia (Judge) Jessich, at Sea Island 4 in 1978.



David Jessich at Berri Water Injection Well in 1976.



David and Frank Jessich in Maryland in 1992.

guess it doesn't catch everybody.... I feel the company has done a lot for my family. There is certainly an amount of loyalty that is there."

When Christopher was two his father rejoined Aramco and Christopher grew up in Dhahran, living close to the library. He completed his schooling in the U.S., spending summers in Dhahran, then went to college and served in the military.

"After I got out of the military, I knew that the next step was Aramco," he says. The company welcomed his interest and valued his background but insisted on more experience in materials supply and an MBA.

Christopher gained the necessary experience and six years later, in 2012, he became the third generation of his family to work for Aramco.

### Enormous pride

Today, Christopher reflects on what attracted him back: "Work-life balance and family. That's it. You can't put it any other way. What organization can you work for where you're not ashamed to leave at 4 p.m. to go to your son's baseball game?"

"I am Aramco. Somebody on the outside wouldn't get that. I was born in the States but I grew up in Saudi," he explains. "I am honored—it fills my heart—to be able to provide this environment to my wife and children.

"Both my grandfathers and my father felt enormous pride in accomplishing their respective projects over their careers with

content. The impact you can see is truly remarkable."

What has stayed constant across the generations of Christopher's family is a fierce pride in the company and the opportunities it offers, together with a deep love and appreciation of Saudi culture.

*Republished with permission from the July 3, 2024, issue of The Arabian Sun.*

Aramco. I always saw that and today feel the same way with my career with Aramco."

Christopher welcomes the changes across the Kingdom.

"The way of doing business in Saudi Arabia has got easier," he says. "I am particularly proud that in my field of procurement we are directly involved in creating jobs locally, creating local



UNUSUAL BRAT HOPES  
TO DONATE DAD'S  
**EXCEPTIONAL  
ARCHIVE**  
TO ARAMCO

BY ARTHUR CLARK



**Jennifer Murphy, an unusual Brat who was born in Dhahran in 1948 but spent her first nine years in Jiddah, hopes to donate a remarkable collection of photos and letters related to the exceptional career of her father, Garry Owen, to the company's new Corporate Archive in Dhahran.**

Owen spent 28 years with the enterprise, beginning with Aramco's original parent, Standard Oil of California (Socal), in London in 1939 and spanning San Francisco, Jiddah, Dhahran and Washington, D.C., with postings to India and Egypt in between.

Murphy was born in Dhahran in 1948, but she grew up in Jiddah. That's where her father relocated in 1941 after transferring to the California Arabian Standard Oil Company (Casoc), Aramco's predecessor, in San Francisco earlier that year.

"For the next 17 years ... he variously represented Aramco in its official contacts and negotiations with the Saudi Arab Government, and often escorted Saudi dignitaries on tours of the United States," *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* said in Owen's retirement story in 1967. "He continued to make frequent trips to Saudi Arabia following his transfer to Washington, D.C., in 1958."

Among his accomplishments at the company, Owen, a Harvard-educated lawyer, established Aramco's Washington office in 1944. He retired as a company director and vice president, Government



**Right:** Garry Owen adopted Saudi dress on visits to Riyadh in the 1940s and '50s. He met King Abdulaziz several times, describing him as "no disappointment—a large man, a strong and kind face—very gracious."

Relations U.S.A. He died in 1971.

The archival materials are associated mainly with the years Owen was based in the Kingdom. They offer new insights into the company and its relationship with the Saudi Government, as well as the Owen family's life in Saudi Arabia.

The collection also includes a leatherbound diary, gold-stamped "My Trip Abroad," dating to 1929. That's when Owen made his first trip to the Middle East, playing the violin in a four-man band on a cruise ship, between graduating from the University of California at Berkeley and entering Harvard.

When the ship docked in Suez in Egypt, Owen took the opportunity to visit Cairo and Alexandria.

"I sort of got sand in my shoes—and I guess I've never gotten it out," he said in a *Sun and Flare* story in 1967.

Owen's "sand-in-shoes" penchant was on full display in the materials on Murphy's dining-room table in August.

As well as visiting the Pyramids in Giza and the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Owen wrote about other discoveries, describing villages with "with one-story mud houses ... with perhaps a camel caravan stopped to rest, or in the distance shepherds tending their flocks of goats. In the larger cities you see many stone buildings ... and beautiful mosques with their tall minarets."

That kind of cultural appreciation also appears in his pictures and letters from Saudi Arabia.

Along with photos of Owen in Arab dress meeting King Abdulaziz, of him accompanying Prince Faysal and Prince Khalid on their visit to the United States in 1943, and Crown Prince Faysal visiting the Owen's home in Potomac, Md., in 1962, there are his pictures of palace guards in Riyadh, merchants in the Jiddah *suq* and Bedouin woman spinning wool in the desert.

Murphy met Prince Faysal on his 1962 visit. "He was very nice—very soft spoken," she said.

The collection also includes photos of the Owens'

**Opposite page, from top:** Owen beckons his daughter, Jennifer, on her tricycle atop Bait Americani, the company's office in Jiddah, around 1950; some 75 years later, she points to photos of a family outing near Jiddah. **Right:** Owen (second row, center) stands to the right of Prince Khalid, with Prince Faysal third from left, at a California shipyard on their trip to the U.S. in 1943.



residence in Jiddah, on the third floor of a traditional building next to Bait Americani, where the company's offices were located; family outings to islands just off Jiddah; and pictures and letters focusing on Owen's trips by car across the Arabian Peninsula from Jiddah to Dhahran and Jubail, via Riyadh—and back—in the early 1940s. They offer unique glimpses into Saudi Arabia in the early oil days.

In addition, there are frank notes about the company's relationship with the government. "We have in our concession the greatest asset [Saudi Arabia] has and it should be developed to the country's use as well as being a profitable venture for the company," Owen wrote in early 1942.

In the same notes, he says the U.S. should institute direct relations with Saudi Arabia. "... the American Government must establish a diplomatic representative in Jiddah—a man with experience in the east, preferably one who speaks Arabic with sufficient position ... to have proper weight with the Government here," he wrote.

In many ways, Owen might have been describing himself, as the company's liaison with the Saudi Government.

As it turned out, the U.S. opened a legation in Jiddah in 1943 and upgraded its status to an embassy in 1948.

In a letter in September 1942 to his first wife, Jane, in the U.S., Owen described a trip from Jiddah to Dhahran by car, during which he saw King Abdulaziz several times in al-Kharj, south of the capital, and in Riyadh. He also attended a horse race with Crown Prince Saud ibn Abdulaziz, where the king was also present, and visited the Riyadh *suq*.

Owen remarked on a stop at al-Dafina, about a third of the





way to the capital, on Sept. 3, a couple of days after departing Jiddah. “[It is] no garden spot to me but to the Arab the one great thing—water—is here, and so it is a focal point where the bedu come with their flocks of camel, goats [and] sheep for a long drink and to fill their *gurbas*

for it may be days again before water is available.

“As we arrived there must have been several thousand sheep and goats at the well, tended by half a dozen women in brilliant red robes—all with the decorative veil of the bedu woman, heavily covered with silver trinkets so that they must weigh considerable and certainly they do not look cool in this hot weather. They are very shy and it is difficult to get close enough ... to photograph them.

“The myriads of children always present are, however, curious just as other children and crowd around the cars.... All have black hair which stands out like a fuzzy-wuzzy.”

He had tea and coffee with the “head man” of Dafina “in a rock-and-mud hut about five feet high, now very much improved with a room built entirely of 15-gallon gasoline drums,” he wrote.

Owen saw King Abdulaziz arrive in al-Kharj on Sept. 5, remarking on his largesse: “As he came along, a bedu family came to the roadside—the king’s car stopped and a soldier got off and gave them something—they all went to their knees and the king’s caravan proceeded. It was quite touching....”

That same day, Owen met several of the king’s young sons playing cards at nearby ‘Ain Dhila and asked them to teach him the game.

“There was great hilarity among the young princes and it was

fun for me,” he wrote, naming the princes as “Sultan, about 16, Turki, about 13, Abdur Rahman, about 11, Suleman, eight, and Naif, about five....”

When Owen met King Abdulaziz formally at Murabba’ Palace in Riyadh several days later, he described him as “no disappointment—a large man, a strong and kind face—very gracious. We had the usual coffee with cold lemonade instead of tea, and discussed the war, the weather and our mutual admiration, he for the Company and we for His Majesty and his country.

“He dressed in the simplest Arab clothes with no ostentation or show. But the rest of the room was quite colorful though not elaborate....”

“Two of the King’s closest advisors and Abdullah Suleiman [the minister of finance] sat across the room from us and all the rest of the room was lined with soldiers and slaves sitting crossed legs and their swords resting on their knees. To get through to the King without permission would require running a very dangerous gauntlet.”

Owen met King Abdulaziz again the morning of Sept. 10 and once more Sept. 11—this time with no soldiers present—before traveling on to Dhahran via Hofuf.

There are several photos of Abqaiq and Jubail and its surroundings in the collection. Owen only stayed a few days in Dhahran on that trip, before driving back to Jiddah.

Some of the most striking photos in the collection show Prince Faysal, the Kingdom’s foreign minister, and Prince Salman visiting California during World War II, with stops at MGM Studios, Radio City and Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood. Owen accompanied them on the trip, which started in Washington, D.C.—where they met President Franklin Roosevelt—and included New York.

During that visit, plans were laid for establishing the Dhahran Air Base, as well as providing military aid to Saudi Arabia. Late in 1943, Washington released scarce steel reserves for the construction of the company’s new oil refinery in Ras Tanura.

Murphy donated some of her father’s archival materials to Georgetown University in 2003. Those consisted “mainly of books,” she said.

She lived in Jiddah until 1957, when she moved to Dhahran with her older brother, Garrett, and younger brother, Stephen, her mother, Frances, and her dad, who had been named vice president of

**Clockwise from above:** Owen captioned this photo of himself as, “It is Cold in Winter”; Jiddah in the mid-1940s; Bait Americani, where Owen represented the company from 1941 to 1957, when he was posted to Dhahran.



Concession Affairs. The family left for Washington, D.C., in 1958, when Owen was promoted to vice president of Government Relations, U.S.A. He was elected to Aramco's Board of Directors in 1960.

Murphy smiled broadly when she talked about her years in the Kingdom—especially in Jiddah—remembering playing on the roof of Bait Americani. “It was pretty much our playground,” she said.

She “escaped” once from her rooftop playground, she recalled, exploring Jiddah on her own for about five hours until she was found. “My family was frantic,” she said.

She was home-schooled in Jiddah, along with children from the diplomatic community. Her second-grade teacher was the wife of the British ambassador.

In 1956, Aramco provided two teachers for the school. “It was like ‘Little House on the Prairie,’” Murphy said.

Next to Bait Americani was an apartment building constructed in the same traditional Jiddah style, where the Owens lived on the third floor. Between the buildings was a garden.

The family moved to a new house in Jiddah in the mid-'50s. When the family moved to Dhahran, Murphy felt like a fish out of water.



“We knew nothing of American culture,” she said. “[We’d had] no TV, no radio. Growing up, my brother, Garrett, and I played records; my mother played piano.”

“Going to Dhahran and seeing a movie was amazing,” she said, noting that the first film she saw there featured Elvis Presley.

One photo from that time shows a sky dark with locusts. The family’s cook—Uthman, who had come with them from Jiddah—happily harvested as many as he could and fried them. But he found no takers among the Owen family when he offered them the delicacies.

“I have a soft spot in my heart for Aramco because I was brought up in the middle of the company and my father loved Aramco so much,” said Murphy, explaining why she wants to donate her father’s archives to the company.

“My children have no particular interest in Saudi Arabia and I think a collection like this should be in the hands of people who would appreciate and use it.”

**Above:** Jubail was a tiny one-street town in the early 1940s. **Below, from top:** Visitors from Aramco get some sleep on the roof of Murabba' Palace in Riyadh; waiting for sundown in the palace courtyard during Ramadan.



# A Trio of ANNIVERSARIES

— BY KYLE PAKKA —

If good things come in threes, then 2024 delivered a doozy: *AramcoWorld* celebrated 75 years, Aramco marked 50 years in Houston and the Aramco Houston Half Marathon notched two decades. To commemorate this trifecta, *Al-Ayyam Al-Jamilah* takes a spin down memory lane.

## **AramcoWorld at 75**

1

“If I would have people read only one thing from *AramcoWorld*,” said Richard Doughty, who retired as editor in 2023, “it would be ‘The Fable of the Rat’ by Paul Lunde, the opening to the Indian Ocean issue [July/August 2005]. It is a story about how we look at places and times and things that are different from our own.”

He said the key message of *AramcoWorld* (which in 2015 adopted a one-word version of its original two-word brand) is “to

improve and grow in our ability to understand places and people that are different *on their own terms*.”

Originating in 1949 as an office newsletter linking the staff in New York with field operations in Dhahran, the publication sought to instill mutual understanding and respect. When Aramco moved its corporate headquarters to Dhahran in 1952, the newsletter evolved into a magazine. Early stories focused on the progress of the



Editor Paul Hoyer reviews page proofs with his secretary-cum-editorial assistant in the magazine's office in the Netherlands in the early 1980s.



**Above:** An editorial team of Robert Arndt (left), Richard Doughty and Arthur Clark selects images for an issue in 2012. **Inset:** *AramcoWorld* aims “to improve our ability to understand places and people that are different on their own terms,” says Doughty, citing a story by Paul Lunde, an Aramco Brat, in the 2005 Indian Ocean issue.

enterprise, enabled by its multicultural workforce.

In 1964, the magazine moved to Beirut, Lebanon, and a new editor came on board: Paul Hoye, who was completing a Ford Foundation Fellowship at Columbia University. The stories broadened in scope to illustrate the interconnectivity of different peoples through history, art, science and architecture, conveyed through strong narrative writing and stunning photography.

Alongside stories about Saudi drillers, exploration geologists and Ras Tanura’s Sea Island appeared articles on calligraphy, pearl diving, the Hajj and evocative sites such as Ur, Palmyra and Petra.

“*AramcoWorld* has been part of a leading edge of a cultural conversation of inclusion,” Doughty observed. “*AramcoWorld* is the inclusion that it wants to promote. Islamic and Arab cultures have been in conversation with Western culture for millennia, and much of that conversation has been mutually positive.”

The magazine moved to The Netherlands in 1975 and to Houston in 1987. When Hoye died in 1986, the editorial baton passed to Robert Arndt, a former assistant editor and Public Relations staff member in Dhahran.

“I wanted to enlarge the geographical range,” Arndt said, “so it moved to being anything remotely connected to the Muslim or Arab world to include non-Arab Muslims—Indonesia, China, and so on.”

Blockbuster issues dedicated to a single topic demonstrated the magazine’s strengths in scholarship and the arts of photography and graphic illustration. Subjects such as the legacy of Al-Andalus, Muslims in the USSR and the Silk Roads showcased the magazine’s philosophy of intercultural bridge-building.

After writing and photographing a handful of stories for the magazine and a book about life in Gaza, Doughty joined the staff

as assistant editor in 1994, becoming editor in 2014 when Arndt retired. Doughty embraced the opportunities offered by the growing sophistication of digital platforms, upgrading the magazine’s online presence by adding videos and creating an app for the publication.

In harmony with the transformation taking place in Saudi Arabia, the magazine delved into previously unexplored topics: surfers in Morocco, Saudi fashion designers, Arab filmmakers and Rai musicians from North Africa. Stories pushed into new territories yet still reflected the guiding idea that, in Doughty’s words, the “experience will expand the reader’s understanding of the beauty and complexity of the world.”

Searching for a way to sum up *AramcoWorld*’s impact, Arndt related an anecdote: “When I was a kid in Istanbul, I was interpreting for my grandparents who didn’t speak Turkish. I have spent the rest of my life interpreting one culture to another and *AramcoWorld* has been a wonderful vehicle for that. I think the magazine has done a lot of good.”

Where will *AramcoWorld* take readers in the next 75 years? Doughty knows one place he would like the magazine to go: Antarctica. “No one has ever come up with a story based out of Antarctica,” he said, “and I looked for one for 20 years.”



# 2

## Aramco Houston's Golden Anniversary

Space City has been home to Aramco, first as Aramco Services Company and now as Aramco Americas, for 50 years. In that time, the office has withstood the challenges of the boom/bust nature of the oil business and storms named Alicia, Allison, Ike and Harvey.

The Houston office has hosted Saudi crown princes and overseen the education and training of thousands of young Saudis. It has procured and transported billions of dollars of equipment, ranging from rivets and school supplies to helicopters and fire trucks.

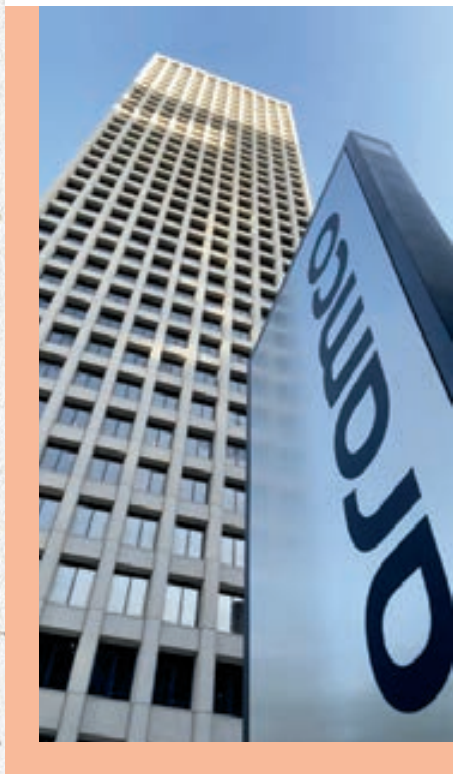
Its employees have volunteered countless hours to help restore Galveston Bay, plant trees and feed the hungry. Over the decades, the company has helped raise money and donated millions of dollars to support causes including literacy, public television and science in schools.

In times of crisis, the Houston office has stood strong with the city and its people. During the COVID pandemic, the company supplied critical medical supplies and donated funds to provide more than 2.6 million meals to people in five cities. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, it rebuilt homes and a school library.

In 1949, Aramco headquarters moved from San Francisco to New York. Three years later, headquarters moved to Dhahran, but the New York office remained to handle affairs in the U.S.

"I came to work for Aramco in 1951," remembered

**Clockwise from right:** Aramco headquarters moved from 505 Park Ave. in New York to Dhahran in 1952. But critical support activities for the enterprise continued there, as did employee sports activities such as women's softball (1953 photo). The subsidiary moved to Houston 50 years ago under the name Aramco Services Company, where today—as Aramco Americas—its offices are located in the downtown area.



Jane Borst, who worked in Manufacturing & Oil Supply. “I started as a clerk and when I left, I was Big Red the Bunker Queen.”

Pat Gallagher joined Aramco in 1956, working in Payroll. “I thought it was the greatest place in the world to work,” she said.

Aramco moved to downtown Houston in 1974, just in time to ride an epic wave in demand for supplies. From 1974 to 1978, air freight increased from 5.6 million pounds to more than 13 million pounds and purchasing activity exploded by nearly 750%.

The Aramcons who moved from New York to Houston fondly recalled the support from the company. “The company, true to its character, made everything comfortable and convenient,” Gallagher said.

There were other benefits to relocating to Houston. “We couldn’t get over the courtesy of the drivers here compared to New York City,” Borst recalled.

In 1984, the office left downtown for the Galleria area. Subsidi-

aries for aviation, training and crude-oil marketing were formed and joint ventures such as Star Enterprise and Motiva Enterprises joined the family, reflecting Saudi Aramco’s growing international downstream presence.

With the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990, Houston staff rallied to aid in the repatriation of employees and their families who elected to leave the kingdom.

Alma Kombargi, then working in Medical, was part of a team that greeted arriving families at the airport. “Staff were enthusiastic and helpful. It reminded me of the Oil Spill Response Team—it was an all-hands-on-deck effort and there was a lot of camaraderie,” she remembered.

The office moved back downtown in 2018, but no matter where Aramco hangs its hat in Houston the focus remains the same: helping enable a brighter energy future.

### Running for Two Decades

3 “It’s a great feeling when you meet up at 5:30 in the morning with the president of Aramco Americas and get the group photo taken,” Tahir Bukhari says, reflecting on the Aramco Houston Half Marathon—which this year marked its 20th anniversary. “At the end of the race, the hospitality is great and it’s great to hear stories, not just about the run but the stories about working for Aramco.”

Bukhari retired in 2019 after 20 years as a petroleum geologist at Saudi Aramco and ran his first Houston Half Marathon in 2020, accompanied by his son, Shaan. He has run in the event three more times, the latest this January when his son and four friends ran together.

The event, held over a three-day weekend in January, is part of a

suite of runs that includes the Chevron Houston Marathon and the We Are Houston 5K, which is cosponsored by Aramco.

The activities bring together more than 300,000 spectators, runners and volunteers and form Houston’s largest single-day sporting event. The charitable component of race weekend raises \$2 million for Houston-area charities each year.

Jessica Burgess, a half marathoner and volunteer from Finance at Aramco Americas in Houston, spoke for everyone at Aramco when she said, “I feel so proud to work for a company that is a significant contributor to this major city event and, overall, sees citizenship as a top priority.”



Tahir Bukhari shows off his badge after completing his fourth Aramco Houston Half Marathon in January this year, the 20th anniversary of the event. All the activities surrounding it are “great,” says the retired Aramco petroleum geologist, who ran with his son, Shaan.



# Mounirah Mosly

## PORTRAIT OF A PATRIOT

BY FUAD AL-THERMAN

This story is adapted from an article that appeared in the July 14, 2024, issue of *Ithraayat*, a publication of The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, or Ithra, in Dhahran.



**Top:** Makkah-born Mounirah Mosly held her first exhibition in Jiddah in a joint show with Safeya Binzagr in 1968. She joined Aramco's Public Relations Dept. in 1978. **Above:** Her oil-on-wood artwork, *The Land of Solidities* (1970). Image courtesy of the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

In 1994, Saudia Airlines honored Aramco employee Mounirah Mosly in its booklet *Pioneers of the Fine Arts Movement in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, presented by artist and art critic Abdulrahman Al-Soliman. In addition to Mounirah, the publication featured artists Abdulhalim Radwi, Mohammed Al-Saleem and Safeya Binzagr.

Such esteem for Mounirah demonstrates the impact of what was truly an impassioned, prismatic and sometimes daring artistic journey which spanned five decades, from the 1960s until her untimely death in 2019. It would be a tragedy to chronicle the history of art in Saudi Arabia without first pausing to reflect on the experiences and vast contributions of Mounirah—who joined Aramco in 1978 and took early retirement in 2003—in opening new doors for those artists who would come later.

Mounirah was born in Makkah to a distinguished family that valued education, philosophy and creative expression. She began drawing at age 12. Her father chose Lebanon for her high school education, followed by studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Cairo University in the mid-1960s.

She held her first joint exhibition with Safeya Binzagr at the Modern Education School in Jiddah in 1968 and her first solo exhibition in Jiddah in 1972. Her exhibitions and show participation continued in cities across the Kingdom, the Gulf, the Arab World and in 12 U.S. states and Europe.

Today, many of her works are held in museums in Arab countries and around the world.

She earned a master's degree in graphic design in the U.S. in 1978 and then joined Aramco as a Public Relations specialist and expert in printing and media design.

Ever since joining Aramco myself in the early 1990s, I had heard of a great Saudi artist working at the company who had won several awards and even recognition from the United Nations. Whenever the name Mounirah Mosly was mentioned, I associated it with Al-Wasiti, which was in the title of an exhibition she held in the late 1990s called *Al-Wasiti and I*.

At the time, I didn't understand the connection between Mounirah and Al-Wasiti. I didn't know that more than 700 years ago Al-Wasiti was one of the most important Arab painters and calligraphers, known for his miniatures and as a founder of the Baghdad School of Illustration.

Dr. Maha Al-Senan, a Saudi academic in the field of visual arts and heritage, says Mounirah invoked Al-Wasiti's work "not to revive him, but to draw creative inspiration from him and to resume a severed connection in expression. She drew from him the roots of Islamic illustration that accompany manuscripts."

I got to know Mounirah well when I had the honor of working closely



with her in the Public Relations Dept. from 2000 until her retirement. She wore clothes and accessories that reflected her interest in the arts, and her hair leaned toward blonde, giving her a blend of East and West. I learned then that Mounirah had a significant role in organizing and judging the annual children's art contest that Aramco ran between 1978 and 2012.

I was in awe of her depths of human sensibility, manifested in her ongoing artistic expressions of childhood. This was only matched by her patriotism, Arab identity and devotion to and concern for the Palestinian cause.

I remember taking my daughters—Deema, six, and Dana, three—to visit Mounirah after work one day. She sat with them and was keen for them to draw.

At that moment, I thought if my daughters knew that they had the honor of learning for an hour from such a master figure, they would have felt immense joy and gratitude. I still keep a small stone-shaped piece decorated with Arabic calligraphy that she gifted me after I left the Publishing and Media Relations Division.

After her retirement, we kept in touch. We organized a visit for her to the temporary offices of the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture, or Ithra, in 2011, when the facility was still under construction. She enjoyed the visit and was pleased by the endeavor.

During that time, the museum team at Ithra acquired *The Young Woman*, one of her most prominent artworks, which she hoped to see displayed there one day.

In my opinion, one of her most notable works is *My Land and My People*, which won among entries by 20 international artists competing to design a poster for a United Nations event promoting women's empowerment.

I think Mounirah transcended traditional norms and explored ways to reinvent them. Many of her artworks are hung unframed or framed with

*“Painting is my world; it allows me to see life, with freedom as its canvas....”*

— MOUNIRAH MOSLY

decorative edging in a local heritage motif resembling remnants of old windows and doors.

In Jiddah in February 2016, she presented an exhibition titled *On the Stairs of Color, There are Traces of My Steps*, showcasing her artistic journey and experience in its various stages over a week's time, coinciding with the art festival.

During this event, she expressed her wish for the establishment of specialized art colleges and institutes in Saudi Arabia, built upon academic foundations aligned with the global fine arts movement. She also urged the creation of contemporary art museums in major cities, in addition to institutions and companies that would acquire artists' works to create healthy demand for art.

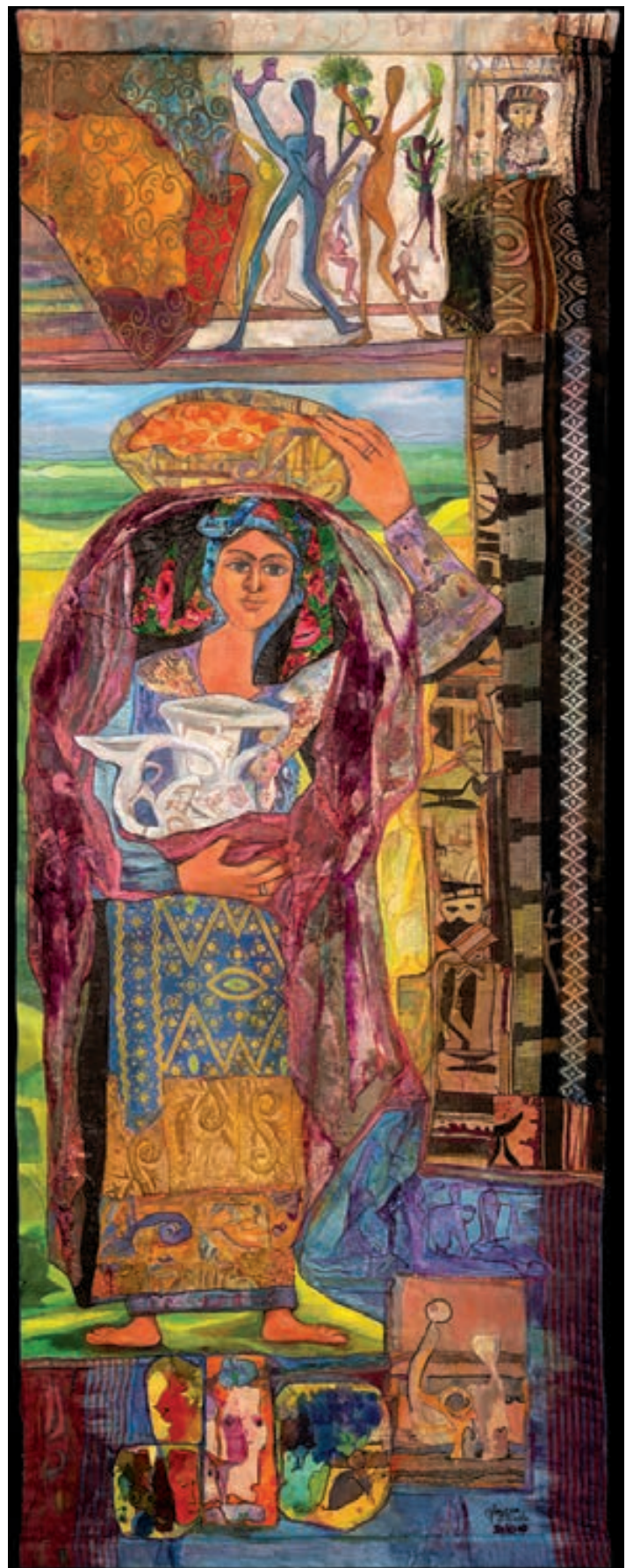
The Kingdom's Vision 2030 came just two months later, placing arts and culture at the heart of Saudi development.

Mounirah died January 11, 2019, and we were devastated by the news. Her passing sparked a wave of sadness and appreciation.

The Minister of Culture Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan Al Saud, published a condolence message on his Twitter page and directed that one of the major art galleries in the Kingdom be named after her in recognition of her outstanding efforts and contributions to culture and society.

Essam Tawfiq, who worked with her at Aramco and knew her closely, tweeted: “Mounirah cannot depart; never can she. Your feelings, with their vibrant colors, the melody of your brush in its beautiful tune, and your spirit that defies anything and everything, cannot depart....”

Ithra published a tweet extending condolences to the artistic community in the Kingdom and to Mounirah's family, calling her “one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Ithra's mission. The center is proud to have one of her most prominent works, *The Young Woman*, in its collection.”



**The Young Woman (2010), a vibrant painting-mixed media work by Mounirah Mosly, is part of the Ithra Museum Collection in Dhahran. Described as “one of her most prominent works,” it was acquired in 2011.**

I remember the words with which I bid her farewell: “Goodbye, Mounirah. She left suddenly, and on the stairs of color are traces of her artistic steps that spanned 50 years between Beirut, Cairo, America, Dhahran, Manama and Jiddah. Determination and pioneering were among her defining traits; she paved an uncharted path and was distinguished by an experimental style that combines symbolism and a high sense of Arab and human expression.”



# Looking Back

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
BY WENDY LEVINE

In the 1980s, I spent three wonderful years living in the Kingdom with my parents, Martin and Rosemarye Levine.

**T**hey had moved to Dhahran so Marty—a computer whiz from the time mainframes took up whole rooms—could set up the Patient Care System at the Dhahran Health Center.

I first joined them from the U.S. in 1981 for a 10-day visit, and Saudi Arabia fascinated me. Dad had recently purchased a 35mm Nikkomat, so I was the happy recipient of his old box camera. Upon noting a graphic composition of proud Saudi men in Hofuf sitting next to the crates of everyone's soda staple, Kaki Cola, I used Dad's hand-me-down twin-lens-reflex to capture the image.

In 1985, I returned to the Kingdom to recover from a horrific auto accident in New Jersey, where my planned three-month stay turned into three years. After so long in hospitals and therapies, my time in Saudi Arabia was delightful.

Before my accident, I'd begun working as an advertising photographer in New York. But Congoleum floor ads and the like

could not hold the power of Saudi scenes.

In my photos I strove to capture universalities that depicted Saudi culture and also affirmed a shared humanity. A little boy reaching for a cookie from his mom did just that, be it in the Dhahran Women's Clinic waiting room or anywhere else. These shots often exuded a quiet calm and beauty.

I was also able to work for UNESCO, *Aramco World* and other entities with an interest in the Kingdom while building a diverse portfolio. In many ways, my time in Saudi cemented a career change from advertising to documentary photographer.

I left Dhahran in 1988 for the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Missouri in Columbia, where I earned a degree with a photojournalism emphasis. Though my portfolio today covers many parts of our world, it began in Dhahran, for which I'm forever grateful. (View my website at: [www.wendylevine.com](http://www.wendylevine.com).)



**Clockwise from top:** Three consecutive frames from an al-Khobar shop selling traditional menswear, thobes, ghutras and 'iqals, 1985; my parents, Marty and Rosemarye Levine, converse while waiting to board their flight at Dhahran International Airport, 1986; two local men pose outside a Hofuf shop beside empty crates of Kaki Cola, 1981.





**Clockwise from top left:** Women wait at Dhahran Women's Clinic, while a lad looks expectantly at his mom, hoping for a cookie, 1987; Dad and I joke with a tradesman in al-Khobar, 1986; boys in a Dammam kindergarten play at being bakers and a girl in a Dammam kindergarten plays house, imitating mommy on the telephone, 1988 (both for UNESCO).

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

*Martin Levine passed away in Maplewood, N.J., during the first wave of COVID-19, in April 2020. He was 93. Rosemarye hung on without him until August 2022, when she died in Maplewood from heart failure. She, too, was 93. They had been together since 1953. They were terrific people and are sorely missed.*



An elegant Saudi wedding featuring the bride, her mother and a sea of guests at a local hotel, 1988.

PLEASANT DAYS FALL 2024

# Al~Ayyam Al~Jamilah الأيام الجميلة

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## Traveling in Style

Ladies from Aramco's 505 Park Ave. offices are set to board a New York Central Excursion Train to Quebec, Canada, for a three-day holiday over Washington's Birthday, read the caption for this photo in the March 1954 issue of *505*. Two decades later—50 years ago—the company's U.S. subsidiary moved to Houston, first as Aramco Services Company and now as Aramco Americas. (See "Anniversaries," p. 26.)

