

K.I.R.N. “Zendegi Zibast” (Life Is Beautiful)

Date: May 16, 2011

Interviewer: Ms. Shahrzad Ardalan — A

Interviewee: Mrs. Yaghoubian — Y

(Bahar’s name in Farsi means “spring”).

A: Hello and welcome to the Life Is Beautiful program. Today our dear guest is Mrs. Fariba Yaghoubian who has joined us in our studio to discuss the changes that she would like to see. Good morning Mrs. Yaghoubian and welcome to our studio.

Y: Thank you, Shahrzad, for your invitation and thanks to the 670am radio station for having me so I can have a few words with your listeners.

A: Is this your first time at the radio station?

Y: Yes.

A: Before we start, we will hear the story of Mrs. Yaghoubian and the tragedy that has happened in her life, which has affected not only her life and her family, but also has shed light on the general problem that we have in our city. The hope is that when a tragic incident like this happens, we can prevent this from happening in the future.

I wanted to thank you personally for being here. I understand that it’s not easy to talk about this. While keeping your daughter’s memory alive, your efforts are set to help many other young people and families and, as a mother, I admire you for this. Let us listen to your story.

Y: Thank you very much. It is definitely a very difficult situation to deal with and I sincerely hope that no other parents will ever be in this situation. I wanted to briefly talk about our Bahar’s life: she was born on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1985. In about 10 days it will be her first birthday that we will spend without her. Bahar was just like her name and in her short but productive 25 years of life, her life was always full of energy, kindness, sincerity, love and passion for life. I’m not saying this as her mother; all of those who knew her would say the same about her. She was the one that all the family members would praise and all the cousins would look up to. Our Bahar was born 25 years ago during the Gulf war and those who have been through that remember that at times, bombs were dropped sometimes 8 times a day and we were forced to take our few-days-old baby with us to the desert, or the mountains or anywhere else to keep her safe. The point is to say that she was raised in these difficult conditions and we have tried hard to make sure she was raised with warm and loving characters. She spent her childhood in Iran and in 1998 our family of 4 moved to the United States. Bahar’s sister is Shadi, who is two years older and is a 4<sup>th</sup> year medical student now. Bahar went to the Paul Rivere Middle School and Santa Monica High School, where she was part of the cross country team and has earned many medals.

She got accepted to UCLA and UC Berkeley for her undergraduate work and since she wanted to stay close to family and friends, picked UCLA. She graduated with a 4.0 GPA and honors. She then applied to pharmacy schools and got admitted to all of her choices. Again, she decided to stay in LA and chose USC. Last Friday was our dear Bahar's graduation ceremony and we received her Doctor of Pharmacy diploma. It was very very difficult for us. We first had decided not to go but then I thought, maybe for the rest of my life I will regret not going to that ceremony so because of Bahar and because of the many years of hard work that she has put into this degree, we went there and received the diploma for her.

As I mentioned, Bahar was in the hearts of everyone and had left her positive effect everywhere she went from her school (between professors and classmates) to her place of work to the family. Her words were full of love, her eyes were full of kindness, and her smiling face is in the memory of all of us.

Unfortunately on January 9<sup>th</sup> of this year (2011), which was almost like a 9/11 for our family, an elderly driver who had lost control of her car and had passed 2 traffic lights, hits my Bahar's car and killed Bahar and a passerby. According to the reports by the police and the witnesses, this elderly driver hit Bahar's car at about (or over) 60mph. This is freeway's speed limit but this accident happened on Santa Monica Blvd (speed limit of 35mph) and Federal Blvd. (30mph speed limit). The elderly driver who hit Bahar was driving south on Federal Blvd. and my Bahar was driving east on Santa Monica Blvd.

It is sad to hear the rumors that have been spread, which torture our broken hearts even more. There were rumors that Bahar was texting or that Bahar had ran the red light or even that she was on the phone. None of these are true. You can go to our website to see the police report and see the documentation. Unfortunately, what has happened to Bahar can happen to us and to our loved ones at any moment. This didn't happen on the freeway; it was on the street. It didn't happen at night; it happened at 10am. No one was drunk or on the phone. Just as any of us drive on the street, this could happen to any of us.

The reason that I'm here today is to save a piece of Bahar's smile and bring a little healing to our broken hearts. I will carry this pain with me for the rest of my life but hopefully we can bring some healing through our efforts to save the lives of the rest of our loved ones. In order to do this, we have created a non-profit organization by the name of Bahar Organization so that we can save the lives of others, keep their smiles and their happiness.

- A: We wish to get a better understanding of the Bahar Foundation and understand what its specific goals are. A similar tragic accident happened a few years ago at the farmers market and we learned that the elderly driver who was responsible for that accident had lost control of the car and had pressed the gas pedal instead of the brakes, which is due to the slow reflexes that inhibit the right reaction. Do you remember how many people we lost on that day?
- Y: Yes, unfortunately 10 people were killed in that accident and the gentleman who was driving was also an elderly driver. A lot of people were injured and 10 people were killed. In the past 4

months since Bahar's accident, I have unfortunately have heard a lot of these stories that have cost the lives of many. Because of this, we have to change the driving system, educate people and look at our lives with awareness. When we learned about the farmers market accident, we were all really sad but personally, I never put myself in the shoes of those who lost someone in that accident. Unfortunately we always have this notion that bad things happen to other people, and this is not true. Now that I'm placed in this situation, I can completely understand how those who lost their loved ones in the farmers market accident must have felt. I hope to no one will ever be in this situation again, which is why we want to continue our efforts. We need to educate people and give them the awareness that this problem can occur at any age. We are not against elderly driving; we love them and soon enough we will reach that age ourselves. When I was little, my aunt wished me that I grow to see old age. At the time I was little and I didn't think that this was a good wish, "Why would I grow old?". Now that I've grown up I understand how great of a wish that was and that it means that one will get to see your dreams come true. Unfortunately, Bahar only lived to be 25 years old and didn't get to see the fruit of her hard work. Bahar had a very bright future in front of her, she treated life and people with enthusiasm and love. She finished her Pharm.D. program at the age of 25 and wished to see her other achievements. It wasn't time for her to go. Her life was cut short.

A: Exactly. For our listeners, you can visit [www.BaharFoundation.org](http://www.BaharFoundation.org), send your emails to [info@baharfoundation.org](mailto:info@baharfoundation.org), or call (424) 262-6604. Tell us more about the goals of the Bahar Foundation.

Y: The Bahar Foundation has been put together by Bahar's friends and her sister, Shadi. In the past four months, despite being emotional and going through finals and other things, they have worked very hard and have gotten together to put together our website. We want to thank them for their efforts, and thank all those friends who have helped us in the past few months. I'm very thankful to them and hope that their help will continue.

We need the help of all others as well, from doctors to lawyers to all those who have contacts with the authorities and can help us start a dialogue and implement positive changes. I ask that those who have any ideas or messages and are familiar with computer to visit our website [www.BaharFoundation.org](http://www.BaharFoundation.org) to join us and share their thoughts with us. For others who might not be comfortable with internet, we have created a voicemail line: (424) 262-6604, please repeat your name and number twice on the voicemail and we will contact you.

We hope to keep the smile and happiness in our lives, the lives of our children and our loved ones of any age. Our goal is to bring joy and promote healthy living. If we can raise the awareness to the fact that those who don't have the capability to drive should stop driving, we have taken a big step. So we need to increase the awareness wherever that we go, whether it be parties or religious centers. Everyone should start with themselves and their families. We need to pay attention to our parents, our grandparents, and our children who are driving and ask ourselves whether we are fully capable of driving and whether we can have the right response in an

unexpected situation. Someone might be 90 years old and have all the qualifications for driving versus someone else who might be 40 or 50 years old and doesn't have those.

I ask all the doctors whose patients who are not capable of driving to notify the patient himself as well as DMV because the truth is, all of us are changing all the time and our capabilities are changing as we age. We need to really pay attention and see which changes have occurred in our eye sight, physical body and brain. It's possible that we might not notice these changes ourselves. I ask that everyone pays attention to those around them and see how they drive. For healthy driving, we need to be drivers who are committed to protecting the lives of ourselves as well as others.

A: As she mentioned, there are eye exams for drivers and these are mandatory after a certain age so that they can make sure that people have good eye sights before they renew their licenses. What's important is that eye sight is not the only factor and the capability to drive and the reflexes in unexpected situations are different for everyone.

Whether you see it in yourself that your reaction time has changed, or if you see in others that the way they speed of their reactions have changed, please pay more attention to how they are when are behind the wheel for the sake of their lives and those who drive along their way. That is the whole point. This is neither to pick on the elderly nor to create fear. We want to create awareness and avoid the kind of tragedy that has happened to Mrs. Yaghoubian's family. This is the hope that has energized her, her husband, their daughter Shadi, and all those who have joined them in this foundation.

Has anything happened to the elderly driver who caused this accident?

Y: No, she had a broken wrist and was taken to the hospital along with our Bahar and the passerby who was hit as well. The passerby, who was a 54-year-old father of 4 children, was instantly killed. Our Bahar passed away from severe impact of the accident after 1-2 hours in the operating room.

A: Did the elderly driver have any history of cognitive issues?

Y: In the past 4 months, the police detectives and the district attorney are still investigating this. Things are going very slowly and this saddens us. This lady is now at home. For the first month or two after the accident, they had not even taken her drivers license away. We put in a lot of effort so that her drivers license will be suspended and she won't be causing another horrific accident.

For those who are listening to this program, I ask that you speak with your children and your friends and spread the word about the Bahar Foundation. I ask that you share your ideas with us. This is a new foundation and we welcome your thoughts. For those who want to make donations, these donations are tax-deductible. Through the website people can use the "Contact Us" and "Get Involved" tabs and show us your support. We need all the help you can give us.

Bahar Foundation is a newly-planted seed and it needs to be cared for. We welcome your support with this. And the driving system in Los Angeles needs to be reviewed and we need your help for

this. Let us water this seed and see the growth and progress of it to a big tree that can save the lives of those we love.

As for the driving system that we discussed, we need to make sure that when it comes to eye sight, and mentally and physically, we are qualified and capable drivers. From the age of 50, our eye sight starts getting affected and a lot of people start getting a double-vision. Our vision starts changing and it might get blurry. At the age of 60, our muscles start changing and on average we lose 25% of our muscle mass. Doctors can explain this in more detail. After the age of 65, a lot of people will have arthritis and other joint conditions, which means we now go through our daily routine with pain and difficulty. Heart attack and strokes are other factors to consider, Parkinson's and other diseases also show in older ages. As a result we have to change our perspective and look at things with a special awareness. We need a concrete plan and should only sit behind the wheel if we have the capability to drive.

During the past few months, I have seen many people with Parkinson's who drive. When I was at Trader Joe's the other day, one driver was in front of me and her trembling was so severe that she couldn't even push the ticket in for parking and someone had to come help her. I was watching this lady for about 10 minutes in the car and she didn't have the strength to get out of the car. In 5 minutes, she had to put effort in getting her shaking hands to her mouth so she could have her pills and only after the pills she could get out of the car. I went up to her and asked, "I noticed that you are shaking. Would you like any help?". And she said no. So I asked, "But you can't drive when you are shaking like that. Do you want me to help you? Do you have anyone who can help you?" She said yes, she has people who can help her. So I asked her why they won't come to her help. She didn't respond. I asked, "Do you want someone to get killed because of your driving?" She said of course not, and I asked then why is she driving. I told her that if she needs help, I will help her.

What I mean to say is that for those who are in this type of condition, please don't think that you will only drive for 2 minutes to the grocery store etc. An accident happens in 1 second. This happened to our Bahar in 1 second and can happen to any of our loved ones in 1 second. So we need to change our system. From the age of 70 and above, they only do an eye exam but this is not enough to determine the full capability of driving. This is not even a full eye exam, as a full exam would include the testing of the peripheral vision.

A: Thank you for joining us.