

"But we had a chance to stand up."

Zohreh Shfahi, 50 years old

[she has articles that Sarvi will send]

This is my family:

Dad, a doctor – 50 when he was executed

Mom – 42 when she was executed

Older brother, a student of mythology – 27 when he was executed

Sister Maryam, at university for literature – 24 when she was executed

Younger brother – 16 when he was executed

Brother-in-law – 29 when he was executed.

We were 5 sisters and brothers, and from my family there is just me and my younger brother left.

We lived in Isfahan. My father was well-known and loved. My father, mother and younger brother were executed by firing squad with 50 others. Their crime was being supporters of the MeK. My father, because he was a doctor, would treat them in his offices.

When they were arrested, they wanted to bring my father on the national TV and have him speak out against the MeK; then they would free them. My mom's answer was 'my child is like thousands of other children who are in the country without anything. And the MeK is fighting for their freedom. I will not go on TV and say this.'

We also had a gathering in our home in memory of a young boy who was killed by the regime. A few months after that, Maryam and her husband were killed in the street. My older brother was killed in prison on the torture table.

We were a very happy family, well off, and we could have done nothing and been fine. But we had a chance to stand up. I am only talking as a witness, but if you speak to any MeK, their story is the same.

I was only 20 when all of these things were happening to me. The normal thing is that when this sort of thing happens, it has to be the end of your life and world, but I could understand that they gave their lives for the better lives of their children, and that gives me reason to live. Other countries have gotten their freedom by standing up, and it is now our turn.

Your message to the women of the West?

Really, we need your help for getting our voice out there. Be the voice of the voiceless Iranian women. It is good to be from one side, to be our voice, but also the women in Iran who are under the worst pressure, unable to say anything.

None of us want anything for us. The whole reason and purpose for our fight is to free all Iranian people from the mullahs. In any way you can, help us to free our country to be like others. We admire and value your support and that's why we have the strength to go on.

"There is nothing left of you to fight"

Homyra Wasschan, 45 years old

Born in Tehran

[she has an article in VSD.fr March 2, 2011 which we need to ask for copy of]

What was the event that for you made you aware/want to be part of the MeK?

From the time I was 14, I could see how the regime stops women from doing what they want to do and from studying, and I wanted to support them. My family was also supportive of the MeK. I became active, seeing what Khomeini was taking away, and the only organization that had the message of freedom was the MeK. We were very active in schools, and Khomeini was stopping us every step on the way.

In 1980-81, I was 15 years old and was imprisoned for 5 years. My crime was giving out pamphlets by an MeK member who was arrested. They were torturing me, and that's when I got the symptoms of a bleeding ulcer. I dropped to 70lbs because of bad food and beatings. Also, we would all give our food to the children there whose mothers were arrested, so we did not have a lot to eat. My kidneys shut down. Afterwards, they started me on dialysis, but they still wouldn't give me the right food.

I was put in solitary for 6 months. There was a heater there that constantly dripped, so I was sleeping or sitting in water all that time. I began to get arthritis. When they saw how sick I had become, and knew my health would not let me go on and fight again, then they freed me. "There is nothing left of you to fight." This is what they said when they let me go.

I was in the hospital for 6 months. After about 18 months, I left Iran, and when I escaped the country they imprisoned my parents for two months. I was newly married to an MeK person; he went back to Iran and they imprisoned him and executed him. Also during this time my uncle was in prison. They had told my mother that they would free him and that she could come with money to the prison. When she went there, she saw his picture in the book of those who were killed. The shock was so bad, it stopped her heart and killed her.

There were three small ones left in the home, myself, my 6-year old sister and 5-year old brother. My older sister (50 now) got arrested in the 2008 election demonstration and is in prison now. When she was originally arrested, they gave her the death sentence. All for joining a demonstration. It was the holy day of Ashura. We found out later that another reason was that she had gone to Ashraf to visit my aunt, cousin, and another uncle. They said she was 'mohareb'. She is sick in prison and has a fibroid that needs surgery. They will send her for that and then bring her back to prison. Also, she has a heart problem that needs surgery, but they cannot do anything until the fibroid is done.

Her daughter got thyroid cancer – they say it was because of the shock of her mother being arrested.

What does your family think?

They are worried about my sister, but they don't blame the MeK. They blame the regime. My sister wasn't like me, wanting to be a freedom fighter; she was just a normal person in a demonstration. My point is that this regime is so bad that all of the families have become hostages because of having family in Ashraf.

How have you found the strength to survive your own health problems?

At the time they arrested me, I didn't know a lot, but over the 5 years as I saw all of my prison friends executed, I saw that by coming out and doing this, it is the only way I can make a change to stop these things.

What is your message to those who suffer physical problems?

Even though you might be physically frail or sick, that is not everything; having hope and going on – that is what is important.

Your message to the women of the West?

My message is the same as that of the 1,000 women in Ashraf: women in the West can believe in that freedom for Iran and can stand with them and fight for that freedom.

Maliheh, 52 years old

When did you first learn of the MeK?

I came to know them (the MEK) in 1357 in process of revolution. I had heard about them through a man who participated in the Shah protests with everyone else. He was later martyred. During the demonstrations, we used to raise pictures of the martyrs and because I have some religious foundations, that's why I chose the mujahedin.

What are your strongest impressions on the MeK as a group? Individuals?

What I knew of religion was very traditional; it was what surrounded me, from my family. When I got to know the mujahedin, I found that their view was very different from what I knew, and that is why I was so attracted to them and chose them as an organization and an idea that I would follow, and why I'm still standing with them. What I can talk about is their progressive views and the values that they have, and how they appreciate the value of women and equality of gender.

Given your expectations from what you had heard/learned, did you find the label terrorist to be warranted?

I must say, at the time they were called terrorists I was still living in Iran. You must have a strong faith in your value system and in that organization. You must believe in them and when you do believe, all of their dangers become your dangers and are taken upon yourself.

I was myself a supporter. I didn't know anybody in Ashraf, and have never been, but I have been a political prisoner myself, and my husband was a political prisoner who was martyred. I must say that after I spent time in prison and after my husband was murdered, I was much more motivated to follow through in the movement. I felt that I had more of a responsibility to carry both his burden and mine.

Before prison I used to participate in the MEK gatherings and protests. I was arrested when I protested in the biggest demonstration the mujahedin ever had, 1.5 million (1981). I was arrested because I stood up for my rights as a woman. That day, they were shooting straight on the people (before, they were just shooting to the side, but this day they had permission). I was a witness to the shooting, but we were all running away in the street, shouting slogans. At some point, we were surrounded and all arrested, along with the people around us, about 15. I was keeping the home at the time, my daughter was 9 months old. When I was arrested, many different people took care of her, sometimes friends, also my mother. There were no meetings allowed with the outside world, so I did not get to see her in prison. When I witnessed other prisoners, that some of them were so young and some so old, and that they were so strong, it kept me strong as well. In general, the vast majority of them were MEK supporters.

What memory do I have from prison? The entire period you spend in prison, every second, every minute is a memory, and repeating those memories is not so easy. This particular memory I will share: a mother was to be executed, and at the moment they were taking her, she was holding her 1 ½ year-old child, and they wanted to separate them. I was wearing a blindfold, so I just heard them, and I heard the mother calling out to the child, 'Zahra, Zahra' as they were separating them, and the child was calling back. I knew this mother. They took her away and that same night she was executed. When I left prison, I followed the story (of Zahra).

Her grandmother was taking care of her. What I know is that she is now married and has children of her own, but to this day carries the psychological wounds.

Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?

Yes, I was tortured in prison. It seemed to me as if the guards were sick, because how is it possible that a person can take pleasure in tormenting another person and feel nothing about it? What we saw was that when the torturer was not present, the other guards were trying to fill in his shoes. As a woman, they wanted to break you down because they thought it was beyond your means to survive, and that was what they thought, that we could not endure this. But we *did* endure it and we *did* stand firm in our beliefs. It seems to me that what they wanted to see was a woman breaking down, not standing up to it, but when they saw that we were standing firm, they were the ones breaking down. They were not human beings.

Nobody knew that I was in prison. I was in prison for about 2 years. Compared to others, I feel quite ashamed talking about it; it was not very long a time. The more you see of other people's pain, the less you feel your own.

What was special in my case - perhaps I was lucky, perhaps unlucky - is that they did not identify me, so I was never sentenced. I feel I was unlucky, actually, because they could not find anything on me. They just got tired and let me go. What they wanted from me was my husband, but when they actually found him and arrested him, they had no use for me. I wasn't sure what he was doing; I was active on my own, and he was active on his. He was a freelancer, and a very strong activist. It was actually an interrogator who told me that he had been arrested.

My story began after I got out of prison. That's when I tried to find my husband. A very short while after, I found out where he was, and found out that he was executed. I was never told why.

I was very young, barely 22 and had a child, and I had no one to take care of me in that country. When you are a woman who has been in prison, and when you have been imprisoned because of an idea that the entire system is afraid of, nobody will give you a job and people are afraid of you. When I think back, I cannot even imagine or see how it was possible for me to endure all of that. It seems to me that prison was easier than being on the outside.

It has not changed how I feel about the mujahedin. I feel proud of the fact that I was able to survive with my integrity intact. When you are a lonely woman with a child, you might do anything, but I did not. I kept my integrity and my faith in God. If you have no vision and no values, then it is not possible for you to keep your integrity.

There are many good people out there, but I wanted to stand on my own two feet, so I wouldn't allow people to help me.

I left very late because I was in the hospital when I got out, but I always wanted to follow up on my goals, to find the thing that I was looking for, that I was fighting for. So 12 years ago I was able to leave (am 52 now).

The thing is that I was looking for them when I came out, where they were and what they were doing, but just after I arrived (here), I found them all and became a drop of water in that ocean.

It is like being reborn. A new life. People that I have been looking for for so many years – there they were. My daughter is doing fine. She lives here (France) now, and has 2 sons.

What message would you give to the women in the West?

To the women in the West: If you do nothing for the women of Iran, at the bare minimum what you can do is to be close to this movement. This is the way in which you can do much more for the women of Iran because Iranian women, while being oppressed, are also fighters. So what they can do is to at least do what they can to support this organization.

I have a lot of hope; if I had not, I would not be here. Hope for a better future for my people, and I have belief and hope for this organization. I am sure that with the help of this movement, my people will see freedom.

I would like to thank you for listening to me.

Mojgan, 49 years old
(shot in the leg)

I am a mother and an Ashrafi.

When did you first learn of the MeK?

I was 15-16 years during the revolution. I got to know them through some of my friends in school. They were a bit more active than I, and they told me about them. It felt like I had been searching for something, and when I got to know them I felt like I could find everything in that group. I was active in school and I participated in demonstrations. I was part of their network – whatever they did, we were part of it. My father did not agree with the Shah, but it was just an opinion he had – he was not an activist. He was an engineer, my mother kept house. I have one brother, 5 years younger.

What are your strongest impressions on the MeK as a group? Individuals?

I did not wear the hijab at the time and did not come from a religious family, but their [the MEK] belief system, their activities, their courage, that they were fighting for freedom to this extent – this was very attractive to me. The way they treated women – even young women were given important tasks to do.

After the big demonstration in 1981, the regime's agents were looking all over for us to arrest us. Despite my family's disagreement with me, I left home. Very often, it happened that at night I didn't know where to go. I couldn't find homes to visit. I was in touch with all of my friends, and we were all active together, but it was all in secret. This was in 1316.

Could you share a story or two of an encounter that really stood out in your mind?

I was to meet a friend of mine and we were supposed to do something, and another friend had been arrested, so those at the prison knew about this meeting after torturing her. People from Evin prison were waiting for us at the meeting. They had brought their car, and when they saw us gathering, they took me and pulled me into the car. So I was brought to Evin. It was a terrible time, because in the car on our way to Evin, they were looking around to find any youngsters

who looked suspicious to grab and take with them. I remember driving by a young girl and they said she looked suspicious.

At the gate of Evin they blindfolded me. The worst part was to witness that my other friends had been so badly tortured. They were bloody, and they confronted me with them to scare me. That was terrible for me. In the space where you enter, the interrogator part, everywhere you hear the screams from people being tortured. Even under the blindfold you can see the trail of blood. There were so many arrests made that they had no time to bring people in as one, so we all sat together.

They had so much information about me before I was arrested that they didn't feel they needed to bother with me and could just send me right into the prison. There was a test before I went from the interrogation area to the prison – they wanted to see where I stood. I wasn't actually tortured, but they do beat everybody when they are arrested. For a long period of time I was told I was going to be executed. They wanted to be sure whether I still felt the same way, or had changed my mind. But a friend of mine, we both had the same story and were a team. The other friend of mine going to the meeting was beaten very badly because she was the head of our team. By coincidence we were placed in the same room one night, and we talked and we agreed on what to say when they asked us. She told me what they had been asking her about, and what they asked about me, so that we would have the same story. She wanted to save me. Then she and my other friend were both executed. The one who revealed our meeting place, she felt so bad if anything should happen to me.

Not for a long time did my family come to visit me. The interrogator came and told me to call home. My mother had no idea that I was in prison, even though I had been away. The interrogator gave me the phone first so that she would know it was me, then he took the phone away and said that they had found me in the street and had arrested me, and they would let her know when I would be executed.

Several months later they were allowed to come and see us through glass. They were so broken down. They were expecting me to be executed at any moment. They couldn't even talk properly. It was very hard for me; in my heart I felt it was not good idea for them to come.

I was in prison for 5 years. I knew a lot of MEK people in prison, and from outside prison as well. All the time, we were together.

The Iranian regime has this special hatred for the mujahedin, but especially toward women because they do not expect them to behave the way they did. They believe them to be second class and weak. Confronting the regime is absolutely not the role of women.

What I found amazing was that not only did I have to confront the mullahs' regime, but my father who was an intellectual. He was so against the way I was acting out, so I was between this and my family too. But they were so afraid that I would get arrested and could not accept that I would take all these risks and still be an activist.

During a period of time that I spent in another prison, there was a delegation that came from Montazeri. The delegation took over responsibility for the prison for a period of time, and took it away from the administration. They took over all the documents of all the prisoners in the jail, and because they took all that away, they gave amnesty to the people in the jail. Prisoners were given time to spend with their families. People who had been injured were let out for a period of time to spend with their families. In that period, some who were given time fled the country. Those that were hospitalized actually fled from the hospital and many went to Ashraf. We knew about this, that they were going to escape, and even collected money for them in the prison. We knew that they were not coming back. So in that period of time, I was also free.

What I heard afterwards was that after the regime found out about the people who fled, they just took everyone to Evin, and things became worse.

The mujahedin sent units to Iran to help the people leave the country at that time. One of the units got me out of Iran to Ashraf. But I went back twice because when you arrived in Ashraf, you were given a choice – you could stay or you could go back and help others to get out, so I went back twice. It was very difficult and I remember every bit of it. It was dangerous because they knew us, since we had been prisoners. Smugglers helped us out.

I remember when we were fleeing the country that because I had been arrested, if they got me again they would do us much more harm. So I made two hard choices in a very short period of time: one was to choose to flee and come to Ashraf, and two was that after being in prison for so long, I chose to come back and help the others, because someone else actually did risk their life to help me. I thought, it's not good for me to feel that now that I have everything, I don't care for the rest. Just like me, the others needed to come out.

I was at Ashraf 1366-72, and once again in 1374, but before the bombing of Iran started the second time, we had already left Ashraf to help the resistance outside. They were trying to organize the network outside in different countries and cities. They set up presidential offices. I was hit by a bullet just before the Iran-Iraq war ended. At the time that they had a truce, and we moved towards Tehran. I remember they were saying (even though I myself was part of a team) that we lived in houses and there was immoral activity going on, but I knew this not to be true.

I remember a different incident that the Iranian regime has been spreading information about. They tried to say that we were part of an Iraqi brigade, but we had nothing to do with the Iraqis. When we participated in that move [to Ashraf], we decided to sacrifice ourselves so that we could make a path for others. Many were killed and many were wounded, and many became hostages.

Many people are relatives of mujahedin, so they know the truth about them. I must admit that the two times that I went back inside Iran to help others, I was so amazed at how people supported us.

We were actually part of the first team that was specific to women. It used to be all men who worked with the smugglers. During this time, the others had worked so much with the smugglers, so the image I had was so different of them. They found it very hard to work with a team of women. The first time, they were very hard on us. They changed their minds after a while, because they saw that we were running as fast as they were running, so they started calling us sisters. But the first time I went to Tehran, I remember, we had addresses of people and we were supposed to find them to go and get them. We had a short time in which to leave the smugglers, find the people, and come back. I remember that I was given an address the first time to stay that night, but the people whose address I had said that they were very afraid and told me not to come. So I spent that night outdoors, and I had no idea what to do. All of the people I knew, I had been told never to seek them out, because then it would be known that I was there. I remember that there was a cab driving by, and when I saw it I thought it was a miracle, that I could just sit in the cab and not have to sleep in the street. While we were driving, I tried to talk to the driver to figure out if he was friendly to the mujahed, or with the regime. He was a young man, and I finally told him I was with the mujahed, and he was shocked. He pulled over and stopped. He said, 'why are you telling me this?' He was very afraid. I said to him, 'the fact that I'm telling you this, I'm the one who is risking my life. So then he said 'what can I do for you?' I said, 'right now I have nowhere to sleep, and if I am on the street, they can have me

arrested at any moment. Then he started thinking and said, 'I've heard of the mujahedin, but I've never seen one.' So he took me to his home, but he was thinking, 'what am I going to tell my mother?' It was one or two in the morning.

He told her that I was staying the night and would have to stay a couple of days, and she said nothing. I think she knew. He ended up driving me to all of the addresses during the three days that I spent there. He was actually such a good man; he collected a lot of money for us, and he was willing to look like a part of our group so that people would believe we were all together. The last night before we left, he gave me a card and said, 'If you come back, or your friends, tell them to call me and I will help.' I very often think of that taxi driver.

The second time I went back, it was the same thing - people were so good to me. The work we were doing was risky and hard.

The second time we had to leave for Zahadan to catch up with the smugglers, but we had lost the ticket to get there, so the day before I went to a travel agency. I checked them out and they seemed to be normal citizens, and I said that I would like to speak to the manager. I was pretending to be someone else, wearing a long black veil, but they thought I was a hezbollahi. They brought me to the manager, and I said that I was a mujahed and was here on a mission. At first he was really shocked, but then said that I had to come with him immediately because he was very terrified. He put me in his car and just left. He asked why I did it this way - wasn't I afraid he might be with the regime?

He ended up helping us with all the tickets, but he told us please, don't just do this again, tell someone 'I'm a mujahedin on a mission'.

What message would you give to the women in the West?

To the women of the West: I believe that the history of the struggle of the women who fight is very rich and that's the reason we have sister Rajavi. It's like all of the history and all of the struggling of these years have come together and are symbolized in her. When our leadership was taken over by a woman, there was a change in the quality of our work, and it was amazing to watch how the men changed.

Many of those people who have been martyred, I have seen them with my own eyes. All the pictures, all the young girls. I believe that even though in western countries the women seem to have all the rights, it is still not the case. There are things that you don't see that keep it from being the case.

I believe that everyone can come together and use this experience of ours so that they are not indifferent to what is happening in the world - so that there will come a day that the whole world is united and people are not so polarized, and there is no longer a whole group of people thinking that our pain is not theirs.