

# About the Speaker



Debra Johanyak, author of the highly-acclaimed memoir *Behind the Veil*, offers audiences a personal glimpse into overlooked and misunderstood aspects of Iranian culture. Her eloquent presentations captivate listeners as she discusses striking perspectives of Iranian politics, family life, religion, and the controversial practice of veiling women. A graduate teaching assistant in Shiraz during the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, Debra struggled with dual identity as a citizen of both the United States and Iran and gained distinctive insights that are worth considering today as hostilities increase between the two countries. Her book, *Behind the Veil*, was published by the University of Akron Press in 2006, and several short stories and articles have appeared in literary magazines and journals, including *The Persian Mirror* and *Writer's Weekly*. Her presentations are well-received by enthusiastic audiences throughout the United States and in Europe.

To schedule a speaking engagement with Debra Johanyak, please contact Debra Johanyak at (330) 628-9729 or by email at [debra.johanyak@gmail.com](mailto:debra.johanyak@gmail.com)

Debra Johanyak walked us all gently, but firmly, through the fascinating events surrounding her family during the hostage crisis. Each domestic tale provided us all with a sensitive glimpse into a world far from our own, and Johanyak succeeded in making these comprehensible, often collapsing the distance between Akron and Tehran by highlighting the common human struggles manifest in both Iranian and American family life. Her stories were sometimes humorous and at other times tragic, but always worth listening to. Our students were energized to ask many questions, from about a thousand different angles, and Johanyak took each in turn as an opportunity to seed additional understanding across our two cultures.  
—**Bill Lyons, Director, Center for Conflict Management, The University of Akron**

Debra Johanyak, a young American wife with an Iranian husband, gives a moving account of her experiences in the early days of the Iranian revolution in 1979. She not only vividly recounts the fears that the hostage crisis ignited in her, but also fondly recalls the deep bonds she formed with her Iranian in-laws. Elegiac and informative, the work is essential reading for anyone interested in gaining a better understanding about Iran and its people.  
—**Guity Nashat, professor of Middle Eastern history, University of Illinois at Chicago**

In *Behind the Veil*, Debra Johanyak weaves the personal with the historical in fascinating detail. Through her own story, a Midwestern woman married to an Iranian man and living in Iran during the hostage crisis, Johanyak provides the reader with sharp insights into similarities as well as differences between the two cultures. The memoir offers a thoughtful perspective on cultural chasms and the bridges we could build to conquer them.  
—**Nahid Rachlin, author of *Persian Girls*, a memoir, and *Jumping Over Fire*, a novel**

To order copies of *Behind the Veil*:  
Call TOLL-FREE: 1-877-UAPRESS  
or visit  
[www.uakron.edu/uapress](http://www.uakron.edu/uapress)

258 pages, 6 x 9  
Cloth 1-931968-38-1 / 978-1-931968-38-6 \$49.95  
Paper 1-931968-40-3 / 978-1-931968-40-9 \$24.95

# Debra Johanyak



## BEHIND THE VEIL

An American Woman's Memoir of  
the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis



# Behind the Veil

Married to an Iranian, and mother of two young children, Debra Johanyak was a teaching assistant at Iran's Shiraz University when the American Embassy in Tehran was taken over by militants on November 4, 1979. *Behind the Veil* tells the story of a woman with dual citizenship who loves both the United States and Iran but must choose between them when the embassy takeover triggers an international and personal crisis.

Johanyak recounts the events of her life in Iran, drawing on her own journal and family letters, as well as public news sources. Against a background of increasing political and religious tensions, she gives the reader vivid pictures of the world she experienced there, in good times and bad—tribal customs in a village wedding, sandstorms, the warmth of the large Iranian family she married into, the threatening pressure of Islamic fundamentalists. Coming face to face with dramatic changes in Iran's government and society, Johanyak must also confront her own identity.

For anyone who has ever wanted to look behind the veil of media imagery and see life in Iran before and after the 1979 revolution, Debra Johanyak offers a clear, intimate, and unflinching view of a culture in conflict, as she comes to terms with her religious faith, political views, and feminist values. *Behind the Veil* chronicles a dangerous time in Iran and America's shared history, and brings us along on the spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage of one Midwestern woman finding her way in a volatile world.

## Previous & Upcoming Presentations

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University of Akron Common Reading Convocation  
at E.J. Thomas Hall

*Spheres of Understanding* Community Program,  
Orville Public Library

"Understanding Iranian-U.S. Conflicts,"  
University of Akron History Program

"The Veiled Women of Iran," University of Akron  
Wayne College Women's History Month

Women's History Month  
High Tea at the Hower House

Women's City Club

*Behind the Veil* radio interview with  
WAKR morning show

Akron Summit County Public Library

"20th Century U.S.-Iran Relations," Akron Rotary

"Iran-U.S. Relations: WWII to the Present,"  
Tallmadge Rotary

*Behind the Veil* discussion during the  
*Author! Author!* series presented by the  
Our Lady of the Elms Alumni Association

"Preparing for Publication,"  
Wayne College Writers Workshop

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