

Nader Agha

A Profile by Tony Seton

Some people shy away from headlines. Nader Agha isn't one of them. He's gotten a lot of ink, especially lately over his involvement in the Monterey water crisis, and much of the reportage has painted him in a less than flattering light. But if you think you can know him just from the media, you can't. Maybe it's a cross-cultural issue, but he's far more complicated than that.

Because Nader was born in Damascus, Syria, "the oldest and the most continuously inhabited city on the planet" in 1943. He came alone to the United State in July of 1965, and specifically to Monterey because he had an uncle who lived here, who was able to help his nephew get settled.

Nader attended Monterey Peninsula College for three years where he studied electronics. "I had a specific interest in manufacturing color televisions, because in those days they needed color televisions, and I had this certificate to manufacture color televisions, but I never used it."

During college, he worked part-time as a waiter at the Del Monte Lodge in Pebble Beach and as a clerk at the Monte Mart grocery store in Monterey. While at MPC, "I got married and started working on buying, fixing and selling real estate - residential commercial, and industrial - which worked very handsomely for us, and paid very well. That was the beginning of the long road which I'm still on."

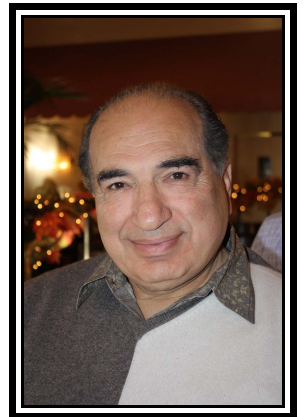
Where is the road going? "The road has no ending. I'm on the road forever."

He had three children, Mahir, Laith, and Sumaya. "Two of them are here, and my daughter is in Jordan working with the Mercy Group helping with the Syrian refugees."

How does the long term of violence in his homeland affect him? "It affects the family, it affects us all. Because of the injustice and massive persecution of the whole country, the whole nation, by a handful of tyrants who think they ruled the country for 40 years, and now they think they own it. They think it's their backyard, and anybody who objects to their ruling the country, they consider him an enemy and they kill him." He was speaking, of course, about the Assad regime, his family and his followers."

Having been managing real estate for more than 40 years, Nader has acquired a number of visible properties, including the Coin & Treasure Shoppe on Alvarado Street in Monterey, and the Holman Building in Pacific Grove, which he has tried to develop into a hotel. "We're always planning, designing, arranging. And whatever happens, happens. We look at the best and then we settle for whatever happens."

One aspect of his public image that seems to have been distorted is that he is said to sue



a lot of people. In fact, he's been sued many times. "I own lots of businesses, and when you do that, you've got lots of people who challenge you, who want to take something from you which you don't want to give. Which creates friction. And the way you defend yourself -- if they sue you, you fight them. If they try to hurt you, you sue them. And I have not sued anybody more than two or three times."

An audit of court records showed that a majority of cases that involved him were landlord-tenant issues. In actual civil cases, Nader was the respondent, not the plaintiff, and he won them all.

Another aspect of Nader Agha is that he has given a lot back to the community but he refuses to talk about it. He says it's because "if I do I lose the benefit of the pleasure and satisfaction by talking about it. If I keep it within me, I am more satisfied than saying, 'Oh I did this or that.'" When pressed for some detail, he said, "I give to nonprofit organizations, I give to people who are in need. I give almost half of what I make away." In the public record are contributions in excess of \$200,000 to the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History.

So let's get back to the water issue. Nader was pushing a desal program a dozen years ago for Pajaro. It was designed to push back against salt water intrusion due to agricultural interests drawing down the local aquifer. The project was blocked by opposing political interests.

Nader is currently using some of his holdings at Moss Landing to develop the largest fish farm in the country. "We finally signed the lease on it, and have begun to utilize some of the existing five-million gallon tanks, to raise fish. It's the same operation they have in Spain and other locations. And what's so nice about the seawater for the fish, you get the same water in, you send the same water out. So there's no pollution.

What does a man of so many interests do to relax? "I work. When I work, I'm relaxed. When I dance I'm elated. I love to eat. I don't sleep a lot, which I should do. I write a lot, mostly short stories, scripts. I have been writing since I was 14 or 15 years old."

Nader and his wife live in Carmel.