

Dr. Mansur Nurdel



Imagine running for your life over snow-covered mountains in the dark, with little food. That was part of Mansur Nurdel's frightening 13-day trek to escape from Iran through Turkey. He describes the journey in his new book, *One More Mountain*.

Born in 1963 to the only Bahá'í family in his Iranian village, Mansur had an extremely turbulent childhood. Due to religious prejudice, he and his four siblings were often harassed, and a brother was seriously injured. Mansur couldn't attend college. In 1979, the family's home was destroyed by a mob, and they fled to the city of Tabriz. Mansur took pictures to record the brutal treatment of Bahá'ís, putting his life in greater danger. At age 25, he was forced to leave his family and country behind.

After 18 months in Turkey, Mansur arrived in Wisconsin, U.S. He worked as a janitor to earn money for college. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, he went to optometry school in Missouri. Today, Mansur owns a thriving optometry practice in Colorado, where he lives with his wife, Roza, and their adult sons, Ryan and Dustin.

Q: What's one of your favorite childhood memories?

A: Playing barefoot soccer in our village with the kids and my cousin, who used to come and visit us. That was my favorite thing to do. As the only Bahá'í family [in the village], we were always persecuted and beaten, [but] during soccer . . . we were part of the group.

Q: What was the most challenging experience for you as a kid?

A: The persecution we faced . . . The hardest of all was that my younger brother was attacked. However, being bullied because of being a Bahá'í has solidified my love for the Faith and . . . who I am today.

Q: What prompted you to write a book about your experiences?

A: Writing this book has been the ultimate healing . . . I wanted people to know what's happening to the Bahá'ís [in Iran] today . . . This is happening right now, right in front of us . . . I hope more people will step forward to write about this and talk about it. It is not easy to open up.

Q: You were 15 when Iran became an Islamic republic. How did life change for you and your family?

A: That changed my life totally. On January 1, 1979 . . . our home was completely destroyed in front of our eyes. [A mob] looted everything we had, literally everything, [including] our livestock. My parents say it took one hour, but I thought it lasted a century . . . We were guarded by some [Muslim] family members from being hurt . . . They [told] us to either go to the mosque and recant our Faith or get out from the village. We chose the second one.



In fifth grade, Mansur loved playing soccer with his cousin in his village of Harvan, Iran.

Questions and
Answers with an
Inspirational Bahá'í



Q: How did you deal with the anxiety of living under government persecution?

A: My grandparents did not know how to read and write . . . My grandfather used to ask me to read *The Dawn-Breakers** for him . . . Later, I learned that he knew the stories. What he was doing was solidifying my faith . . . The anxiety did not bother us because we looked at [it as] “We are the current Dawn-Breakers.” [That] doesn’t mean it wasn’t hard. It gave us perspective [on] how to handle it.

Q: How did the Bahá'í Faith influence your career choice?

A: After high school, even today, there is really no future for Bahá'ís . . . My career choice [was] really defined by what Bahá'ís are able to do in Iran . . . [For example], you cannot [do] anything with food, because Bahá'ís are [considered] unclean. So I looked into the eyecare business . . . That helped me to [find] my current profession.



Above: Mansur and his family enjoy the sunset at a park near their home in Colorado (left to right: son Ryan, wife Roza, Mansur, son Dustin).

Left: Mansur examines a patient’s eyes at one of his offices. He says, “I love really being able to make a difference in their vision.”

Q: Was it hard to leave Iran? What gave you the strength to keep going?

A: I really didn’t have a choice. Some atrocities happened to our beloved friends [and] I took some pictures . . . So I had to leave. It is absolutely not easy to leave everything behind . . . There were two routes to escape . . . Pakistan [or] Turkey . . . But in 1988, they were not taking any refugees in Pakistan. So my only option was Turkey, which is a much harder, harsher route, [with] mountains as high as 15,000 feet . . . The total journey was 13 days of walking [in] the dead of winter. [I drew] strength from the Faith . . . and of course, relying on [my two friends] . . . We would walk at nighttime and hide in the daytime.

Q: What can kids do to help those who are persecuted for their faith?

A: Read the history of the Faith . . . plus take action . . . I don’t think I could have been able to endure what I have without my reliance on the history of our beloved heroes . . . And call [your] congressmen and say, “I’ve learned that the Bahá'ís [in Iran] are persecuted . . . I want you to sponsor this resolution.” It will have much, much more impact than an adult calling. [Also], when you meet someone with a different language, different accent, don’t make a judgment, don’t [believe] a stereotype. You might be losing a beautiful story . . .