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#### **Whittier Public Library's**



# Book Club in a Box

## FUNNY IN FARSI

## About the Book

In 1972, when she was seven, Firoozeh Dumas and her family moved from Iran to Southern California, arriving with no firsthand knowledge of this country beyond her father's glowing memories of his graduate school years here.

More family soon followed, and the clan has been here ever since. Funny in Farsi chronicles the American journey of Dumas's wonderfully engaging family: her engineer father, a sweetly quixotic dreamer who first sought riches on Bowling for Dollars and in Las Vegas, and later lost his job during the Iranian revolution; her elegant mother, who never fully mastered English (nor cared to); her uncle, who combated the effects of American fast food with an army of miraculous American weight-loss gadgets; and Firoozeh herself, who as a girl changed her name to Julie, and who encountered a second wave of culture shock when she met and married a Frenchman, becoming part of a one-couple melting pot. In a series of deftly drawn scenes, we watch the family grapple with American English



(hot dogs and hush puppies?—a complete mystery), American traditions (Thanksgiving turkey?—an even greater mystery, since it tastes like nothing), and American culture (Firoozeh's parents laugh uproariously at Bob Hope on television, although they don't get the jokes even when she translates them into Farsi).

### About the Author

Firoozeh Dumas was born in Abadan, Iran and moved to Whittier, California at the age of seven. After a two-year stay, she and her family moved back to Iran and lived in Ahvaz and Tehran. Two years later, they moved back to Whittier, then to Newport Beach. Firoozeh then attended UC Berkeley where she met and married a Frenchman. In 2001, with no prior writing experience, Firoozeh decided to write her stories as a gift for her two children. Random House published these stories in 2003. Funny in Farsi was on the SF Chronicle and LA Times bestseller lists and was a

finalist for the PEN award in 2004.
Critics and readers of all ages have loved her stories. Jimmy Carter called Funny in Farsi, "A humorous and introspective chronicle of a life filled with love -- of family, country and heritage."

Orange County Reads One Book selected Funny in Farsi as its book of the year for 2004. The book is now on the California Recommended Reading List for schools. You may have also heard Firoozeh's commentaries on NPR. Page 2 Book Club in a Box

## Critical Praise

"What's charming beyond the humor of this memoir is that it remains affectionate even in the weakest, most tenuous moments for the culture. It's the brilliance of true sophistication at work. -Los Angeles Times

"Today, as Middle Easterners in the United States are subject to racial profile, stereotyping, and sometimes violence, this book provides a glimpse into the immigrant experience of one very entertaining family." -Library Journal

"...a gentle life story by an author who clearly loves her fellow man, and who is dedicated to pointing out the deliciously absurd aspects of both American and Iranian culture; as such, it is a joyful success..." -Newsday

"...Firoozeh is helping our community set our image in our own words, and on our own terms...." - National Iranian American Council

"...remarkable tales of family resilience told with wry humor shorn of sentimentality..." - San Francisco Chronicle

"...When I picked up "Funny in Farsi...A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America," I didn't think I'd stay up all night to read it in one sitting--never mind laugh out loud at every page! ..." - Salam Worldwide



Funny in Farsi, Firoozeh Dumas' first novel was nominated for a Pen/USA Award in Creative Non-fiction in 2004.

# Further Reading

If you liked Funny in Farsi, you might like:

Saffron Sky: A Life Between Iran and America

by Gelareh Asayesh

To See and See Again: A Life in Iran and America by Tara Bahrampour

Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran

by Azadeh Moaveni

House of Sand and Fog by Andre Dubus

A World Between: Poems, Short Stories and Essays by Iranian-Americans

edited by Persis M. Karim and Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami

Funny in Farsi

## **Discussion Questions**

#### For Adult Readers

1. How was the author's family's experience of America impacted by the capture of American hostages in Tehran and the publicity surrounding that incident?

- 2. The author considers her family "non-practicing" or secular Muslims; how do you think this orientation affects their interpretation of the practices of many other religions they found in the U.S.?
- 3. Do you think the author's experience as an immigrant was more difficult as a female than it was for her brothers? In what ways?
- 4. What humor devices make this book funny? Give 2-3 examples to show how the author takes some awkward moments and makes them funny.
- 5. Humor is often quite culturally based, so that what's funny in one culture is simply not in another. Do you think other Persians would find this book funny? What about people from other cultures?
- 6. Most of the incidents in *Funny in Farsi* come from a child's perspective; had the author been older, do you think she would have found the same incidents funny?
- 7. If *Funny in Farsi* becomes a motion picture, do you think the scenes will be able to capture the humor appropriately, or will it require a narrator's interpretation?
- 8. Contrast the acceptance author Dumas reports from her Southern California neighbors and the non-acceptance she experienced from her French in-laws. Have you personally experienced such a contrast in acceptance? How did you deal with it?
- 9. If you were asked to illustrate ONE scene which typified the humor in *Funny in Farsi*, what scene would you draw?
- 10. The author gently pokes fun at Southern Californians and Newport Beach residents, in particular, when she characterizes them as obsessed with tennis and tans. Do you think her experience of America would have been substantially different if her family had settled in the Midwest...or in the American South? Why or why not?
- 11. How was the immigrant experience of this family impacted by the times, i.e., the culture of America in the 1970's and 1980's? (Consider technology, political influences, popular culture—television, entertainment, etc.)

**Source:** Mary E. Barton, Ph.D (Orange County Reads)

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#### For Younger Readers:

1. What do you think it would feel like to move to another country where everything is unfamiliar?

- 2. Why is it important that we learn geography?
- 3. What is the difference between "different" and "weird?"
- 4. How do you feel and react when you meet someone with a really difficult name that you can't remember? How do you feel when your own name is mispronounced?
- 5. Have you ever felt like an outsider? Do you have to be from another country to feel like you don't belong?
- 6. How do you react when someone offers you a new food? What is the polite way of reacting if you don't want to try it?
- 7. What is the one thing you would want immigrants to know about America?
- 8. What can you do to help someone who has just moved to America?
- 9. What American tradition would you want all immigrants to know about?
- 10. Why is it important that we learn about people from all over the world?
- 11. What does global village mean to you?
- 12. Who is your favorite character in the book and why?

**Source:** Mary E. Barton, Ph.D (Orange County Reads)





