

There's no doubt that Jahangir Golestan is a man with passion, whether talking about his career as a life insurance agent or waxing philosophical about the traits that tie humanity together. Perhaps nowhere is his passion more evident, though, than in his latest film.

When an earthquake rocked the Iranian city of Bam in December 2003, killing more than 50,000 people and leaving roughly 100,000 homeless, the part-time filmmaker and full-time insurance agent wasted little time assembling a camera crew. The tragedy was the worst of its kind in Iranian history, but Jahangir managed to find an uplifting story among the rubble and turn it into an award-winning documentary.

Jahangir first screened his movie, "Bam 6.6: Humanity Has No Borders," in early 2007. In April of this year, he took home the best documentary prize at the NOOR Film Festival in Los Angeles, which is focused on Iranian-American culture. "I believed in the story and I had been visualized this project in my head for years, so it was really satisfying to win this award," says Jahangir. "I am also humbled by the letters

performed surgeries to fix Freedman's shattered legs, ribs and back. When Freedman's parents came to visit, the surgeon who worked on her would not take money for his services. "It was amazing to see the love and care she received," Freedman's mother says in the film. "We were told that she was a guest in this country, and they would not take money."

As someone who grew up in Iran, Jahangir has always had a fascination for bridging the gap between Persian and Western culture. He grew up in Esfahan, Iran, and moved to the United Kingdom at age 16. It was in London that his love of movies flourished.

"I grew up loving American movies. John Wayne, Steve McQueen, Charlton Heston were heroes of mine," Jahangir recalls. "From childhood, I always wanted to be a

Jahangir Golestan's film finds hope among the rubble

I receive from people who say I have changed their perceptions about Iran."

After reading about the disaster in a magazine, Jahangir set out for his native Iran to begin filming. He saw the potential the film could have to promote unity between Iran and America, a subject that has been near and dear to his heart for most of his life. "I'm trying to bridge the gap between the Middle East and the west, Iran and America," says Jahangir. "I wanted to show that we are all cut from the same cloth, and I think I did that by showing the compassion of the Iranian people in the aftermath of the earthquake."

The theme fits well given the film's subject. "Bam 6.6" not only follows the aftermath of the earthquake, but also the story of a young Jewish-American couple, Adele Freedman and Tobb Dell'Oro, who were visiting Bam at the time. Despite their obvious differences in culture, the Iranian people went out of their way to help Freedman, who suffered extensive injuries to her legs and back when the guest home she was staying in collapsed in the quake. Unfortunately, Dell'Oro died of his injuries.

Jahangir visited the scene of the devastation and conducted numerous interviews with the victim's families, eyewitnesses, Freedman and her family. The film took him four years to complete, and he mortgaged his house to finance production. But it was a labor of passion, not profit. "I made this film to promote peace and harmony in the world, not to make money," he asserts.

And Jahangir's passion for promoting peace is evident throughout the film. The storyline goes back and forth between the locals—some of whom lost their entire families—and Freedman and Dell'Oro, who were pulled from the rubble by their tour guide. Doctors at a local hospital

filmmaker. I wanted to pursue film school but I faced obstacles—financial and otherwise."

Film school was not to be, but Jahangir never forgot his dream. He moved to California about 20 years ago to meet a nephew who was living there and entered the life insurance industry at his nephew's behest. And Jahangir's coworkers are some of his biggest supporters. Part of the proceeds of the film will go to the children of Bam, and several fans of the film have donated to Jahangir's cause through a nonprofit called From the Heart Productions. He also released a new travel documentary on his hometown, called "Esfahan: Pearl of Iran," in November.

Jahangir plans to continue making films in his spare time, and he remains passionate about his cause. "Everywhere you look, there are good people," he explains. "You just have to open your eyes to them."◆

—Mike Karsnak

BAM 6.6
HUMANITY HAS NO BORDERS

