Early Years in the US and Education:

Mahbod Seraji came to America in May of 1976, with the intent of obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering, and then returning to Iran to work in its booming construction industry. But it wasn’t long after his arrival that upheaval and turmoil swept his country -- the Shah was overthrown in 1979, the American diplomats in Tehran were taken hostage by a group of radical university students, and Saddam Hussein’s army attacked Iran, starting a war that lasted over eight years and claimed over one million lives – and Mahbod was forced to change his plans by staying at the University of Iowa until 1989 and securing his Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate degrees.

“Those were the worst years of my life,” Mahbod recalls. “Besides the grim news out of Iran, I was penniless. There was no way to get money from back home. And as a foreign student, I was only allowed to work 20 hours per week on the university campus.”



Facing a dire financial situation, he convinced university officials to make an exception and allow him to work extra hours. “I worked at the university laundry facilities, at the business school library, and at the university’s physical plant, tagging steam valves and pumps,” Mahbod recalls. Despite working 10- to 15-hour days, money was still tight. “I was always a semester or two behind in paying my out-of-state tuition. And I used to smoke back then,” Mahbod recalls. “Sometimes I had to choose between buying lunch or a pack of cigarettes. On most days, it was easier to skip a meal than to go all day without smoking!”

In 1984, Mahbod was almost killed in a horrific automobile accident. “I was stopped at a stop sign at midnight, coming back from a late shift,” Mahbod recalls. “A semi-truck coming from the opposite direction lost control and hit me on the driver’s side. No one believed that I came out alive from the twisted jumble that used to be my car. But I was badly hurt, and I spent a good deal of time in the hospital. Depressed and penniless, I hurt too much to work and as a foreigner, I wasn’t entitled to unemployment benefits. So as soon as I got out of the hospital, I went back to work despite the doctors’ orders and the enormous physical pain. I was taking massive doses of pain killers and anti-depressant pills. It was horrible, but I had no choice: I had to work.”

Professional Career:

Mahbod started his professional career at Motorola and for most of the last 20 years, he has worked in senior level positions for companies such as Arthur Andersen, Forum Corporation, DDI, PeopleSoft, Chiron and Juniper Networks. Currently, he works as an independent management consultant and lives with his wife in the San Francisco Bay area.

Throughout his career, Mahbod has worked in more than 25 different countries. He is an excellent and sought-after speaker, and is often invited to teach executive development programs across the globe. Mahbod also coaches executives and loves to teach and discuss cultural issues in relation to managing business, and politics.

Writing *Rooftops of Tehran*

Mahbod says that he read his first book, Jack London’s White Fang, on the same rooftop that is depicted in his debut novel.

“I was fascinated by how a writer could transport a reader to an entirely foreign land and make him feel at home,” Mahbod recalls. “I knew right then that someday I would write my own book.”

Originally, Rooftops of Tehran was intended to be a series of short vignettes telling the stories of the people who had a profound impact on Mahbod’s life. “The idea came to me when I was a student,” Mahbod says. “I was standing outside my workplace in freezing cold weather, smoking a cigarette and wondering why my life was so damn miserable. No money, no social life, no fun, I thought my younger years had been stolen from me. But then I began to think of the wonderful people who had in some way or form touched my life. I realized, perhaps in a state of euphoria, that I had lived quite a wonderful life. Right then, I thought of writing a book and calling it something like, The Stars in My Life.”

Despite his excitement for writing, Mahbod was too busy with his corporate life to devote any time to his true passion. In early 2,000, after losing a job to cut backs, he seized on the opportunity to begin his adventures in writing.

“I wrote the first chapter and created Ahmed, Zari and Faheemeh, and that was the end of my plans for writing a series of short vignettes,” Mahbod remembers. “I couldn’t let go of those characters, and Rooftops of Tehran became the story of those young kids.”

In the original version, the narrator of Rooftops was nameless. Eventually Mahbod’s editor convinced him to choose the name: Pasha Shahed. Pasha was the name the author would have been given if Mahbod was not chosen for him, and Shahed is his mother’s maiden name. But it has deeper meaning, too: Shahed is also the pseudonym used by his father, a prolific and well-known Persian poet.

Rooftops took about three years to write. Mahbod says sometimes he would start writing at seven o’clock in the evening and would write all through night without realizing how much time had passed. Rooftops of Tehran is not an autobiography, but some of the events in the story are based on actual experiences.

“The main characters in the story will certainly recognize themselves if they ever read the book,” Mahbod says with a smile on his face.