

## Becky and Barb's Adventure at Expo 74

My name is Becky and I was 14 when the World's Fair was in Spokane. We lived up in the Shadle area and I didn't get to go to downtown too much, maybe once a month. And every time we would go there, it always seemed the same until about 1972 or so. Then, every time we would go downtown, it seemed like there were always big changes. Buildings were being torn down. The railroad bridges that always looked like they would just fall down were just gone one day. No wreckage. No crushed cars or casualties. It was just like they were never there to begin with.

I had a friend, Barb. We went to elementary school together, but she had moved to the South Hill back in 6th grade. Even though she went to LC, and I went to Shadle, we were still really good friends. We would call each other once a week, even write each other letters! Can you imagine that? We were only about five miles apart but we would write each other. My mom and Barb's mom were friends, otherwise, I probably wouldn't have been allowed to do sleepovers at her place. A couple times a year, usually in the summer, we would do these sleepovers - she at my house or me at hers. Her place was more fun because it was close to downtown where there was a lot to do.

Barb's dad was a mailman, and he was really funny and cool. My dad worked at an engine rebuilding shop. He was a crank grinder. Both our families were barely middle class. After Expo 74 had been going for about a month, I got a letter from Barb, and in it was a clipping from a tabloid - the National Enquirer or Weekly World News, there were a bunch of these newspapers back then, right at the grocery store checkout line. The part she had cut out was about the Loch Ness Monster, and it had a blurry picture of the thing too. In her letter, Barb said that she had seen something similar at the World's Fair. Now, I knew Barb could be a kidder and I thought this was a pretty funny joke. I suppose there were things all over the world that I didn't know anything about, so a monster that lived in a Scottish Lake could be a possibility, at least to me.

I had already gone to the fair once. It was expensive, at least for my whole family. There were six kids and my mom and dad. My little brother got sick on a ride and we had to go home, so we didn't see much. All the public schools did field trips and I got in on one of those too. That was the last week of school. It was for an English class, which had nothing to do with Expo 74, other than we had to write a paper for it. I saw a lot of interesting things there, but I would think, if there was a sea monster to be seen, I would've noticed the line for it, or an advertisement or something.

Back to Barb's letter. It was the weekend when I received it, and the phone was tied up the whole day with my dad home and the rest of us too. So, I didn't call her until

Monday night. The conversation was pretty quick because we had a time limit on how long we could talk.

We chatted about the usual stuff, how dumb everything was: boys, our parents, the TV Show Kung Fu, and finally I was able to ask her if she was just kidding about the monster. She assured me that she was not. It was in the Iranian Pavilion she said.

Back then, Iran and the United States were on really good terms. They were allies. It seemed like all the countries at Expo 74 were our allies except the USSR. I always thought maybe the Russians just came here so they could be close to a SAC base. Maybe they just wanted to spy on Fairchild AFB to see what was going on with our B-52s.

Barb said that the thing she saw in the aquarium tank at the Iranian Pavilion, looked just like how she thought a baby Loch Ness Monster would look. The display said that it was not fully grown, she added. So, it was possible that this is what gave her that idea. Barb gave the description of it looking like a snake, but with a big belly and fins where its feet and legs would be. It looked like a dinosaur and was only about three feet long. She might have said that it was just under a meter long. We were all trying to learn the metric system because we were told the United States was going to join the rest of the world and start talking in meters and liters really soon. So, sometimes we would practice.

Barb said the glass tank the creature was in was about two-meters long by one-meter high and wide. Pretty big. There were a lot of pumps and stuff attached to the aquarium. She said the creature just swam around and around. She noted that Iran has an ocean on two sides of it. If anybody was going to have a sea serpent, why not Iran?

Barb's dad's postal route took him right into the fair itself. On some days, she would tag along with him. She would enter the fair with him and a couple hours later, exit with him. They would meet by the garbage goat at a prearranged time. The garbage goat was a popular rendezvous spot for families. Barb said she only saw the sea creature thing once and then never again. It was there the first time. The next time she came, there was no tank and nobody working there would give her a straight answer on where it went. Sometimes they wouldn't even admit that there was ever a tank or anything in it. She had been back about three times.

At first, I didn't know what to think. Barb was given to flights of fancy. Her mom and dad doted on her, maybe because she was an only child. My parents said she was spoiled. All I saw was a girl whose parents encouraged her and were nice to her. Her dad built her a little studio in the basement where she would paint and write. She would also do her

homework down there. It was like she had a job in being a good student and making art, and her parents encouraged her in that job. I knew that being imaginative was just part of her job description. She wasn't afraid to be loud, be odd, or stand out. My parents taught me that my job was to be quiet, not stand out and just fit in. Apparently we were being raised for different positions in life. I was the wildest in my family and I was nowhere near as crazy as Barb. Although, I wish I was. I would say, as adults, we became much more alike in temperament, and we're still friends.

So, the next time I slept over was in the summer. School was out and I could go with Barb and her dad downtown. Barb's dad always wore a neatly pressed uniform. It was like his postal service clothes made him an important person, an official. He was our ticket for entry into all sorts of places downtown. When we slipped into Expo, Barb asked her dad if she and I could just walk home, instead of meeting up with him, and that we would just get lunch at the fair. He said that would be fine. He gave her ten bucks and said "You girls have a good time." I was just hoping that he didn't tell my parents. They would come unglued. That Zodiac Killer had been busy down in California and my parents were sure he would be visiting the World's Fair. I mean why not. Just because you're a serial killer, it doesn't mean you wouldn't want to be educated and entertained in an international and environmentally conscious fashion.

That day was a blur. We ate some applets and cotlets for lunch at the Washington State Pavilion. They are the state candy, I think, or they wanted to be. I never liked them very much and neither did Barb, but she made a good point when she said that we should eat them for our lunch. They were free and you could eat as much as you wanted, if you just kept coming back in different waves of people. Plus, they had the added benefit of causing queasiness. This queasiness would keep us from being hungry the rest of the day. We could spend the \$10 her dad gave us on something else. Her logic made a lot of sense when she said it.

The Iranian Pavilion was a boxy structure. It was painted red, white and green. The paint job reminded me of Christmas, even though the day was warm and I don't think the Iranians did Christmas. Inside the building there were a lot of mirrors and pictures of ancient ruins. Of course there was some sort of environmental angle, because that was the theme of Expo 74. There were three Iranian people greeting visitors, answering questions, and being goodwill ambassadors for the Iranian government. There was an older man, a guy in his 20s and a very beautiful woman, maybe in her 30s. They were dressed nicely and had pins on their lapels that featured the flag of Iran (white, green and red) crossed with America's red, white and blue. Underneath the flags were two hands clasped. Best of friends. At least for the next few years.

When they saw us they seemed nice, but then a wave of recognition moved over their faces and they whispered to each other. I bet they were saying something like “There is that crazy girl and now she brought a crazy friend. Barb ignored them and she walked right over to a large, very heavy and ornate table. On its top where some potted plants and some books.

“This is where it was,” she whispered to me.

The older man walked over with a smile on his face - “Hello again Barbara. Still looking for the Gandarewa?” He put his hand on her shoulder. Obviously Barb had been bugging them about this table a lot.

“Yes,” she spoke right up, and shrugged his hand off. “This is my friend Kathleen. She is a writer for our school paper and we want to do a story about the sea monster.” Of course, my name was Becky, we didn’t go to the same school and I didn’t even read our school newspaper. If you are going to lie about one thing, might as well keep going, I suppose.

He smiled down at me. “Hello, Kathleen. There is no sea monster.”

I surprised myself and jumped into my role, reaching into my purse for nonexistent paper and pen. “You called it “Gandarewa?”

“Yes.” he looked me in the eyes. Big warm brown eyes. He didn’t seem angry, just bemused. “Gandarewa is a story about a sea monster. You might call him a dragon. A very naughty dragon. But, it is just a story. There is no such thing. My name is Babak.” He shook my hand. “I am sure your readers would be more interested in the history of Persia, the beauty, what we are doing to preserve that beauty...”

I cut him off, “My readers are only interested in the truth!” I was enjoying myself. I could feel Barb’s approval radiating out of her.

Babak dropped my hand. “You Americans start being Americans at such an early age.” Then he turned and started talking to others in the crowd. He was done with us.

The Iranian woman and the younger guy watched us leave.

“Nice work!” Barb laughed. “You are really good at this stuff when you want to be. I want to know what they did with this Gandarewa. I smell a rat. If this thing was in the

Russian pavilion and then it disappeared, I would have alerted the authorities right away. Maybe it is a dragon, like he said, and it's going to start fires around here."

There were always buildings on fire in Spokane back then. How would we even notice more stuff burning down? I told her that it made no sense for an underwater creature to be able to breathe fire. It seemed counterproductive.

We were both leaning against the Skyfloat pole discussing our next move. The Skyfloat was like a chairlift that you could ride around on. It was sponsored by a root beer company. I remember the word "Riblet" stenciled on the top of the chairlift pole because I remember thinking how some ribs and a root beer float would taste pretty good right about then. Standing in the sun, realizing that the apple and cotlet antihunger inoculation was waning, a young man approached us. He was the same guy from the Iranian pavilion. The young guy.

"My name is Abbas." He stuck out his hand to shake both of ours. The sleeves were too short on his gray sport coat so when he relaxed his shoulders and extended his arm, it looked like his arm grew three inches. I thought to myself this guy would make a good magician.

"Charmed." we said after both of us had received our official-like handshake from Abbas. We put on an air of aloofness and disinterest. I was reaching for my fictitious notepad and pen again.

"You have been to our display four times now." Abbas' English was perfect.

"Yes," Barb replied. "One time when you had the sea monster. Three times after you got rid of it. Oh, I know, you're going to tell me again that there was no sea monster. Well that's..."

Abbas cut her off. And his eyes said it all. There was a sea monster. And then his voice confirmed it. He looked at me and made a motion for me to keep the invisible paper and pen in my purse. I complied.

"Yes, we had a baby water dragon, but we had to get rid of it. Your city has very strict rules about displaying animals. It is not encouraged. And they asked too many questions about the Gandarewa. So when we told them we shipped it back, they, as they say in your films, "Got off our backs."

“What, you just stuck a bunch of stamps on it and stuck it in the mailbox? Come on!” That came out of my mouth.

“No. There are shipping companies. Out countries have good relations and it is not a problem.” That’s what he was saying, but the way he looked when he said it...

He told us to stay away from the Iranian Pavilion from now on. He put a please at the end of the request. He shook our hands, again very officially, and left.

“I don’t think he was telling the truth,” I said to Barb.

“I don’t care,” was her reply. “I just wanted to show you that I wasn’t crazy or a liar. If you really were a reporter for your school newspaper, this would be what they call a ‘scoop,’ even at Shadle Park.” Then she laughed, and so did I.

I don’t remember much more about that day, except that walking back home we passed the outdoor French restaurant and it smelled really good. It took us about a half hour to get back to Barb’s house, just in time for dinner. I think it was macaroni and cheese. Barb must have pocketed the ten dollars her dad gave us.

There wasn’t any kind of Internet back then so I had no way of looking up whether these sea creatures were common, or if Gandarewas were even real. I tried looking them up in the encyclopedia at school, but couldn’t find anything.

As years went on, I had almost forgotten about the Gandarewa.

Then, I was at a party, later, in the 1980s. One of the guys there worked for Washington Water Power, now called Avista. He worked on the dam and power plant downtown. We started talking about the Iranian hostage situation, which was going on back then, and I told him the story of the Iranian sea monster.

He listened politely and then told me his own story. He said he saw this same creature way before Expo. It was in 1970. It was about twenty feet long, and looked like it had died, floated down the river and wound up blocking one of the inlets to the generators that made electricity for downtown. He and a coworker had to fish it up with poles, ropes and grappling hooks and a winch. They were told to do it at night.

His partner was a Native American. According to this Spokane Indian Tribal member, the creature was called a lightning snake. Like the salmon they would mostly live in the ocean and then spawn in freshwater. They held a lot of power. Sometimes, they would

live in lakes. He described what it looked like and, to me, it sounded like Barb's Ganderawa, only about seven times bigger. The man I talked to said he wanted to take a picture of it, bring it home, tell the newspapers. It would really put Spokane on the map. His friend, the Indian, was adamant about throwing it back in the water, only, of course, on the other side of the dam. He told of misfortunes that followed those who had kept, or ate (yuck), a lightning snake. The man reluctantly agreed with his friend and they put it back in the water. He thought that the Iranians might have caught the lightning snake out of the Spokane River and decided to display it in their pavilion. He thought they probably let it go when people started paying too much attention.

Was that the beginning of their national bad luck? Unlike the hostages, they did release the creature pretty quickly... If that's what really happened.

I did look up "Gandarewa" once there was the Internet. It fit the description of the creature too. So who knows.

Maybe a lightning snake and a Gandarewa are the same thing. If so, I think it's comforting to know that these animals of water go where they want, unless we get in the way. And if there is a way around us, they will find it. No borders or boundaries. No political agenda. Eating, mating, loving, enjoying the water in which it swims - all over the world. That's what I think being a Gandarewa must be like.

When I found out about all this, and thought more about it, I called up Barb and told her. She said we should be more like lightning snakes. Then she told me what she did with the ten dollars her dad gave her.