

Farewell Mr. Schroeder, by Arash Abkhoo

This essay commemorates the life of Charles Schroeder and his invaluable photographs from Abadan, Iran, 1958-1960.

*Note: The original essay was posted on the web at [http://www.arashpix.com/weblog/2011/11/post\\_5.php](http://www.arashpix.com/weblog/2011/11/post_5.php) and was also printed in a weekly newspaper in Abadan. This translation was prepared by Paul Schroeder based on suggestions from several sources, with great appreciation.*

Dear Mr. Schroeder,

As I write this you have been gone from this world for just a few hours. After a century of experience and work including photographs from around the world, you have now gone to the other side of life and now look at this world from the viewpoint of another.

I have heard that as people get older, they lose their short and long term memories, and I have seen this in many people who have lived 30 or 40 years fewer than yours. What was the secret of your youthful exuberance throughout your life?

I was quite surprised at your response, when I suggested on your 100th birthday that you were a great sociologist. You replied that you are not a sociologist at all, any more than any other person who lives among and communicates with all people.

As you turned 100, you did not neglect to say that you found the people of Abadan to be cultured and intelligent, and you said this with the authority of the heart. Your words held great meaning for me.

Now I want to offer a few words for you that have been buried in me, but until now I have not had the opportunity to share them.

Mr. Schroeder, when war broke out I was only a child and didn't have any memory of earlier years. I knew about Abadan from my grandfather's and grandmother's tales, the stories I heard from my mother and father. You translated their stories into pictures, documenting the images that were in our minds and converting them into reality. You gave us photos of everyday places, bambow, dairy farm, joogh, taxis, daleh barber, Braim village, refinery office, First Lane, amiri, the labor day celebration ... Thank you for these.

During the war, when we were living in another city as evacuees, a teacher in my class asked "Who is from Abadan?" and I replied that I was. The teacher told us about war and displacement, and added that god was angry with the people of Abadan and Khorramshahr for their corrupt and immoral lives, so the cities were destroyed by war. After that my classmates would insult me.

Thank you, sir, for your photographs, which moved me to tears that had been held back for many years. Your photos from even 20 years before the war showed that, contrary to my teacher's words, the women of these cities wore the chador and scarf, and that the people of these cities believed in religion and maintained the morality from long ago. Your photos showed this to me.

Mr. Schroeder, when I went back to Abadan all of the people said with astonishment what the city was, and what it had come to be. Even after 20 years of returning, people still imagine Abadan as a utopia as against now. Sir, we thank you that you showed us poor people and their pains, and you proved to us that the pronunciation and meaning of some words like pain remain the same.

Mr. Schroeder, thank you for showing us that morality is the highest value for human beings. Without morality, other virtues are empty. I saw your loving faithfulness to your family through your photos, and I thank you for that.

Mr. Schroeder, you are alive in your photos, and your memories from one century will carry forward from one generation to another. Now I can fathom the secret to your youthful and happy life. Few of the people whose photos you shared are still alive. Who can not be moved by the glance of a little girl who wistfully watched your daughter Ellen riding her horse, or the smile of the little boy offering a lamb in his hands, or the proud way of standing of the taxi driver who seems to be the owner of the world. Now the images of the barber and the poor children of Braim village will not disappear from humanity's mind.

Mr. Schroeder, you have defeated death. The world just owned your body, but your soul has been released from its cage.

God bless you.