PROFILE

Layla Sabourian: Building a Brighter Future from the Darkness of the Past

by Fayette Bruun



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Born amid the disruption of the Iranian Revolution in a country where women have been systemically oppressed for decades, Layla uses her suffering to fuel her inner fire. Though she was orphaned at just eight years old, she never let that stop her from fighting for her place in the world and reaching out to others facing similar injustices. Now, she represents a new social model of inclusivity and diversity through both her writing and the companies she champions, setting an example for a better future.

Easement is the enemy of brilliance, and Layla Sabourian is a shining example of how hardship shapes some of the most aspirational, driven, and inspiring people. Born in Iran at a time of massive upheaval and strife, Layla was orphaned and taken in by her aunt and uncle. Though she sometimes struggled with her identity and felt caged by her circumstances, she still developed close ties to her family, culture, and homeland and seeks to share her love of family and cultural exploration with others while building a better world through her writing and business endeavors.

Writing for a More Empathetic Generation

At the age of 14, Layla left Iran for America. Since then, she has lived and worked on five different continents. The discrimination she faced as a child due to her personal circumstances and as an Iranian woman abroad was a foundational factor in her career. While some might simply bemoan the unfairness of the world and fall into pessimism and resignation, Layla took it as inspiration. Her biggest takeaway? “I learned that most prejudice is caused by ignorance and lack of education.” She set out to inform her community and the world at large by writing her memoirs. These are a gripping tale underscored by the often hidden and very human lives of the disadvantaged and helplessly innocent, trapped beneath the political plays and war-time chaos which grabs much of the media attention, as well as the journey of a young woman trying to find her place after being set adrift from her heritage.



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She hopes to someday share these memoirs with the world, providing awareness for cultures demonized abroad, for children caught up in cruelty and loss, and for women and other

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disadvantaged people trying to find their way in a world tailored to a much smaller subset of the populace.

In the meantime, she is expanding her literary outreach to children, her other passion. Having two daughters of her own, her children's books reflect the same goals she has as a mother: to raise a generation of children who are aware of their own and other cultures, compassionate, and emotionally intelligent. You will find the theme of cultural awareness throughout her works, such as in *A Gift from Tonga*, where she narrates the adoption of her daughter from Tonga and highlights the diverse cultural influences they all share as a family.

Culture and family have always been important aspects of her life. After leaving Iran, she felt separated from her heritage and missed the feeling of connection it gave her. She remembered celebrating special holidays surrounded by friends and family, and wanted to ensure her own children fostered a connection to their heritage. During the pandemic in 2020, it became even more difficult to be with family and friends, and she realized that many children would be feeling disconnected from their loved ones. To share her own experiences, as well as those of her children, she wrote *Nowruz in the Times of Corona*, highlighting the Iranian New Year celebration and the importance of connecting with family and friends, especially during difficult times.

Beyond the Written Word

Layla's fight for a better future goes well beyond her writing. After facing discrimination based on her race and gender and witnessing first-hand how much harder she had to work for success because of it, she wanted to ensure others had better opportunities. In 2017, she co-founded FairFunders, a nonprofit initiative designed to create equal opportunities for talented entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities to gain funding for their ventures and build a more sustainable, tolerant world. She also acts as an advisor for the Women's Startup Lab and has mentored women from all over the globe for the past few years.



'Nowruz in the Times of Corona' by Layla Sabourian

Her flagship project, however, is Chef Koochooloo — which means Little Chef in Farsi — an educational software platform poised to revolutionize education around the world. This innovative system was first conceptualized when Layla's daughter, Delarai, was bullied at school for bringing healthy and culturally diverse lunches. As she comforted her daughter, Layla took the time to teach her a Persian recipe while discussing the importance of eating healthy and being respectful of other cultures. Taking this a step further, she went to her daughter's school and

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taught the other students the same recipe and lesson — they loved it! Thus, Chef Koochooloo was born.

Now, this software platform continues to grow as it teaches interdisciplinary, intercultural STEAM concepts to K-5 children through fun, interactive cooking lessons. They are already established in many schools, community centers, and private homes. Their goal is to one day spread globally so that they can teach the recipes and cultures of every country and, as she declares, “connect children to a world bigger than themselves.”

Layla dreams of a more inclusive, tolerant, and empowering life for people around the world and strives every day to educate, enlighten, and inspire others to be their best and make a positive difference. She is the woman her younger self would have been proud to be and hopes to encourage others to be the same for themselves.

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