



## Found in Translation

**Bringing the autobiography** of a Jewish scientist, who narrowly escaped the Holocaust, to a predominantly Shia Muslim readership is not as quixotic a project as it might seem, insists Pouya Jamshidi.

“Anyone anywhere who is interested in neuroscience will relate to Eric Kandel,” says Jamshidi, an Iranian-born college student who spent last summer in Kandel’s lab at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. “His contribution is one of a kind and really, to a great extent, his life story is also the story of neuroscience.”

Jamshidi immigrated to California with his parents in 2002 and is now a



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26-year-old senior at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). He calls his time in Kandel’s lab “a life-changing experience. I was surrounded by the most brilliant people, including Eric himself, who is a legend in neuroscience yet was very approachable and friendly.”

Reading Kandel’s book, *In Search of Memory*, Jamshidi sensed a connection. “Aside from having a tremendous intellect, he has a real passion for science. I like to think that in my own perhaps naïve way I have that passion too.” He decided to translate the book into Persian in the hope that others in Iran, Afghanistan, and the Persian-speaking diaspora will be inspired to choose a life in science.

Kandel, a longtime HHMI investigator who won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 2000, has genuine affection for Jamshidi—“just a wonderful human being”—and, despite concern that the translation venture could absorb too much of Jamshidi’s time, says that “it seems perfectly innocuous, so I won’t stop him.”

Kandel also admits to pleasant surprise that he and Jamshidi turned out to have so much in common: “He’s extremely engaged in the science and very serious. But he’s also very cultured. Unlike most kids of his generation, for example, he likes the music I like”—both are opera aficionados—“and not only that, he’s much more knowledge-

able about it than I am.” (Before he emigrated, Jamshidi, at 20, was the assistant conductor of the Tehran Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra.)

Jamshidi, who has been working in a nerve growth factor lab at UCSD, spent the summer studying similar growth factors in Kandel’s signature animal model, the giant sea slug *Aplysia californica*, as part of HHMI’s Exceptional Research Opportunities Program. He has been invited to return to Kandel’s lab after he graduates. Once there, he plans to start the translation project and begin contacting academic publishers in Tehran, from whom he expects “a very positive reaction.”

Long term, he plans to apply to M.D./Ph.D. programs, with hopes of doing neuroscience within a neurosurgery practice at a teaching hospital. At UCSD’s Center for Neural Repair he’s been participating in animal surgeries to optimize nerve growth factor gene delivery; the techniques could one day lead to treatments for nerve injuries and even neurodegenerative diseases in humans. “In the future these kinds of therapies are probably going to be delivered by neurosurgeons,” notes lab director Mark Tuszynski.

Jamshidi feels the tug of pure neuroscience but finds the blend with a medical career a better fit with his passions. “I love doing surgeries but I also love studying the brain,” he says. —*Jim Schnabel*