

Little Kabul

*My Home Away from
Home*

By Jesse Docena and Todd Parker

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My Home Away from Home

*The Story of Three Afghan Women
and their Incredible Journey to Little Kabul*

By: Jesse Docena & Todd Parker

Dedicated to Yassamin, Maryam, and Farida

Foreword

I have always found it quite interesting how Americans don't embrace other cultures. You would think that we would, since we have so many different people living in America, but we don't even take time to learn about any of them. America has been said to be a "melting pot" for several people. This is true for countless reasons, but we have so many things to learn about each other in order to determine whether a melting pot, is a positive thing for America.

For as long as America has been a nation, we have had people immigrate here from various different cultures and backgrounds. Most Americans have not looked outside their own roots and embraced other people's culture other than ourselves. As a result, many misconceptions exist within our society about other people. Misunderstandings arise every day about different cultures and stereotyping has become so common that it is acceptable for many to make racial slurs or accusations.

Without being simplistic, the origins of *Little Kabul, My Home Away from Home*, came from a desire to know more about Afghan culture. I wanted a deeper understanding of how Afghan women, especially those who immigrated to America. Upon researching the history of Afghanistan and its culture, I wondered if there was a predominant Afghan community here in America. I was eager to know more about the way they live, the way they dress, what they ate and more so, I wanted to hear their stories.

Farída



Walking through the town with no more than a few small bags, a woman and her family leave what life they had in the city of Kabul. The woman walking with her small children is without a husband because he was taken by the communists. When the communists first invaded, her husband was one of many who were asked to accept Soviet reign over Afghanistan. When asked if he would support their cause, he boldly replied, "I will not sell my country; I would rather die than sell my country." He came home to his family that night and spoke to his daughter, Farida, about refusing to live under communism. Although confused about the political situation at the time, she was forever mesmerized by his words of resistance. Young Farida only understood that it was important for her father to remain loyal to his country.

Later on that night, her father was abducted by Soviet soldiers. They ordered Farida's mother to leave Afghanistan within twenty-four hours, or they would be executed. Soon enough, Farida and her family left with small bags of clothing as well as the limited food they had. Farida's mother told her if anyone asked where they were going to tell them that they were on their way to a wedding. Awfully scared at the time, they covered the inside of their palms with henna and prayed to God that they would not be caught.

Within a few months, Farida and her family made it through the mountains and arrived in Iran. After living a year in Iran, Farida and her family immigrated to Pakistan where she remained for about ten years. After becoming a refugee nurse, Farida finally moved to the United States and settled in the small neighborhood called "Little Kabul," located in Fremont, California. Farida had left her life in Afghanistan for good, knowing that she had very limited options. Her rights had been taken away and she was a refugee. If she returned, she would have to live in constant fear with gun shots reverberating down the street. Farida knew that she and her family could never return to Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the words of her father still stuck with her for the rest of her life. "I will not sell my country; I'd rather die than sell my country."



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Farida Aziz , a member of the Little Kabul community immigrated to America when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.



A typical restaurant in Little Kabul, with authentic Afghan furniture.

“If I could change one thing in Afghanistan, women would have freedom and they would finally be able to speak out . . . because in Afghanistan you cannot speak out.”



Farida with her daughter.





Many other Middle Eastern people have immigrated to the Little Kabul community in Fremont, California.





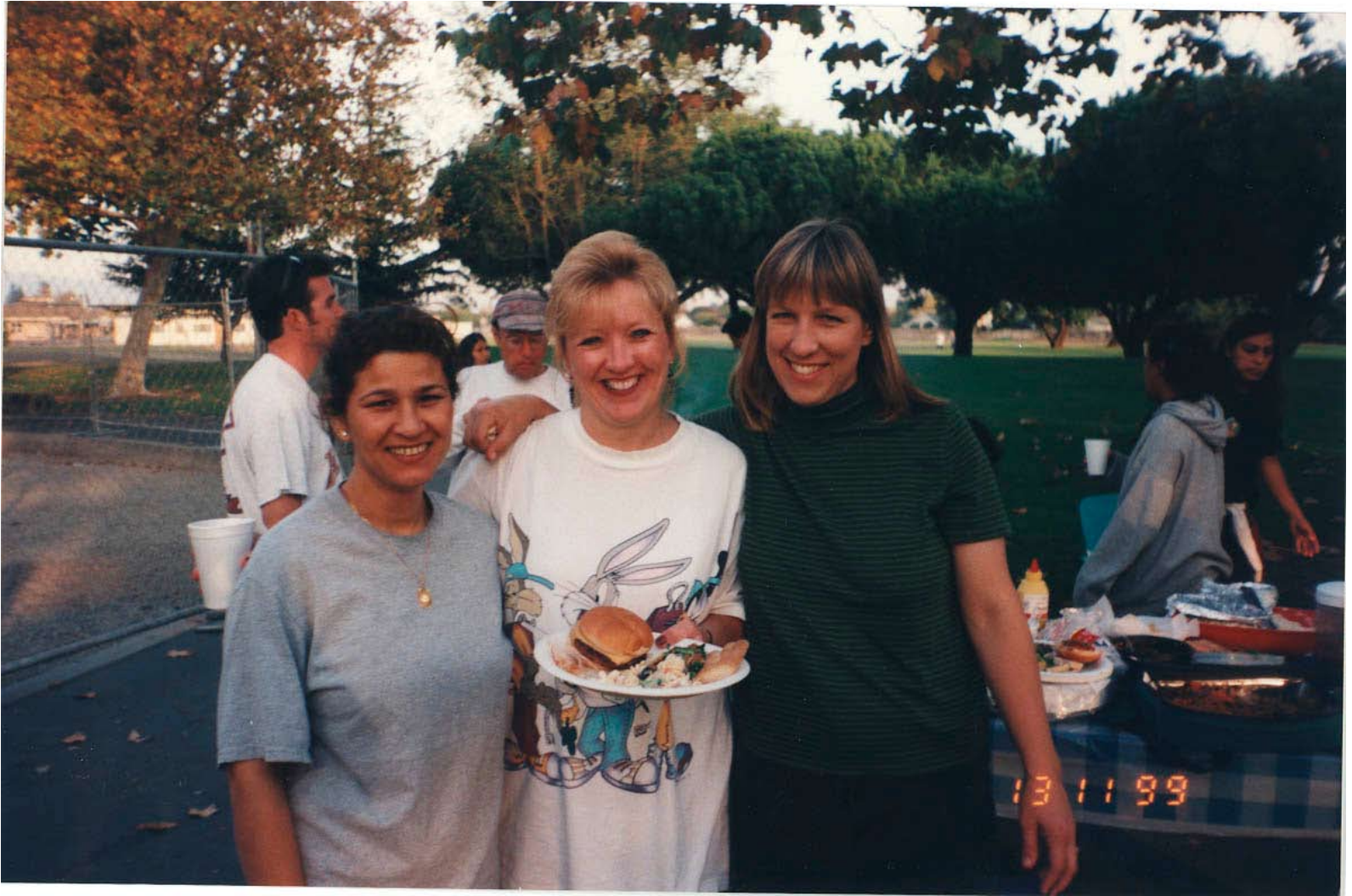
Little Kabul is home to many prospering businesses.



Fremont Boulevard is the center of Afghan businesses in Little Kabul.



Fremont Boulevard serves as a strip for many Afghan restaurants, markets, travel agencies, and theaters.



To my friend at Nasa Bab Mum Farida,

John Daykin
Oct 31, 1948



Farida, before she left Pakistan as a refugee nurse.

Yassamín



In 1979, the communists invaded Afghanistan. They instituted curfews and created order in the country, making it mandatory for people to carry identification on them. As a result of the mandates, about five million Afghans fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran refugee camps to escape the horrors of communist reign. For about ten years, until 1989, the Soviet Union governed the Afghan people putting them through hurdles and limiting their freedom.

Afghanistan faced total chaos due to anarchy after the Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan. This was partly due to the fact that the United States lost interest in Afghanistan following the end of the Cold War. After the fall of the communist government in 1992, the nation was left in ruins and without order. An extremely religious, Sunni Muslim organization called the Taliban fought to obtain power in Afghanistan for about four years. They finally formed a new government in 1996, which enforced many fundamental beliefs that branched from Islamic Law. The people of Afghanistan, especially women, were forced to give up many of their rights. Women were forced to wear the Burka, a traditional Islamic garment that covered the body completely in accordance to the Taliban's translation of Islamic Law. Women were also not allowed to be educated or heard in public. While the people of Afghanistan faced hardships, a small Afghan community was developing in the United States.



In the heart of Fremont, California, over 10,000 Afghan refugees gathered in a small local neighborhood called “Little Kabul.” Mainly comprised of Afghan restaurants, markets and other small businesses, the area has become home to many who immigrated to escape the Soviet Union in the 1980’s. Located in the city’s well-known Centerville district, “Little Kabul” has laid low for many years, until 9/11 provoked a flock of reporters to visit Fremont. Since then, the two blocks of Fremont Boulevard that make up “Little Kabul” has been the center of increased investigation by mass media everywhere. After 9/11, many people were concerned by the growing Afghan population in Fremont and felt threatened by what the media revealed about it. As a result, several misconceptions have arisen from the “Little Kabul” neighborhood.

Emotions ran high in “Little Kabul” when people heard about the fall of the Taliban following 9/11. Women and men embraced each other with the extra welcoming of “salaams.” Many bought food at local markets for a celebratory dinner. People passed out traditional Afghan candy to children, cars honked their horns vigorously and, most of all, American flags waved gracefully from the doors of local businesses and houses. Everywhere, people smiled and gathered in festivity as they heard the breaking news. “Taliban Reign Falls in Afghanistan.”



Piles of traditional Basmati rice at Yassamin Wassie’s family owned grocery store.







Yassamin stocking Afghan commodities in her store.



“I can see this town growing, so I’m really proud of all these things happening.”









Yassamin and her husband Daud Yousufi.

Yassamin at her home in Fremont, California.



Maryam



Most people don't know about the celebrations that occurred from the Afghan neighborhood that day. Since they keep themselves so isolated from the world, many misunderstandings about Afghan culture and its people have arisen. Yassamin Wassie, an Afghan woman was shocked to hear when a co-worker of hers approached her at work and claimed that Afghan people were "terrorists." All Yassamin could say after being insulted so awfully was that "this is not fair. I'm not a terrorist." Yassamin was young when the Soviet Union invaded her country. She and her family emigrated to "Little Kabul" in search of being accepted somewhere else. After many years, she found a neighborhood to settle in that was quite "homey." Since then she has embraced the neighborhood for what it is.



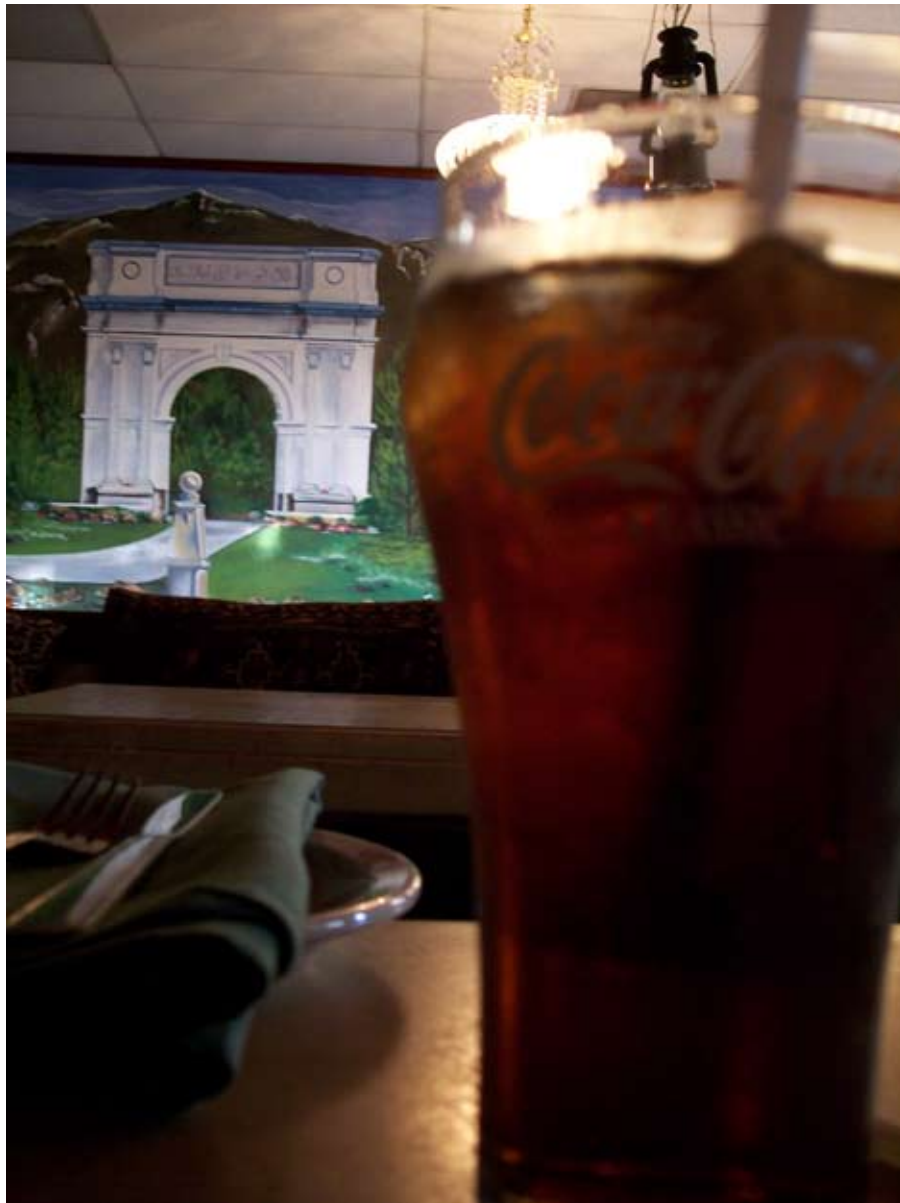
Yassamin claims that the reason they named the neighborhood Little Kabul was because, "when people say they live in Little Kabul, it's like saying they still live at home ... in Kabul." Yassamin claims that she finds it "convenient" to live in Fremont and that they have businesses and family. They do not have to travel long distance to see relatives because they live in the neighborhood as well. If she needs to buy anything traditional she does not have to go far. Non-Afghans find it very troubling to see the Afghan population grow more and more every year. This is partly due to the fact that most people do not understand the culture. Farida Aziz, a nurse who currently works at Stanford Hospital says that, "we should educate the people about the situation. People should know about Afghan people and what our culture has to offer." She was very upset to hear one day that a co-worker asked her, "Where is your Burka? You're from Afghanistan. Why do you not wear a Burka?" Many misunderstandings have arisen from the "Little Kabul" neighborhood and more people are becoming intolerant towards the discrimination they face for being Afghan. When the community first formed in Fremont, most of the people that immigrated there sought to escape persecution and harassment. They were welcomed in Fremont and felt at home in this small community. Now, the people of "Little Kabul" face discrimination in a post 9/11 America. Afghans everywhere can only hope that America becomes more educated about the situation and learn that most Afghans are not terrorists. When asked to respond about the discrimination she once faced from a co-worker, Yassamin claimed that "it is not fair. Every culture has terrorists. Muslims, Jews, and even Americans. Timothy McVeigh, who is responsible for the Oklahoma City Bombing, is a good example of an

American terrorist. We are loving people and I can only hope that people are educated about us."



Maryam Wassie had a long journey to America. She left Afghanistan when the Soviet Union invaded and went to Iran, Holland and Canada before arriving in America on September 11, 2001.







“In America, money grows on trees. You just have to work hard and reach for it. In Afghanistan, if you work hard there is no guarantee.”

Maryam with her mother-in-law Farhat.



One of the many stores in Little Kabul that many Afghan women shop at.



Maryam with her year old baby.

Maryam contemplates the day she will one day visit Afghanistan.



THE END