

# A Tale of Two Afghan Brothers And Their B-town Restaurants

by Peter Dorfman

Bloomington is home to two restaurants offering authentic Afghan cuisine: Samira, on the northeast corner of the Downtown square, and the Turkuaz Café on East 3rd Street. How the brothers who created these eateries found their way from the turbulent Central Asian nation to southern Indiana is an authentic American immigrant saga.

The story begins in 1981, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Like many young Afghans, Anwar Naderpoor, a university student born and raised in the capital, Kabul, went to Pakistan to join the *mujahideen* (Islamist militias forming to resist the Russian occupation). “But when I got to Peshawar [in Pakistan], I realized these were not people I wanted to work or fight with,” Naderpoor recalls. “So I decided to go abroad, because I couldn’t go back.”

Naderpoor secured a French visa and wound up in Toulouse, where he studied economics before emigrating to the U.S. He met his wife, Mary, and the couple settled first in Virginia. Eventually, they moved to Indianapolis, where Naderpoor and a family acquaintance partnered in an Afghan restaurant named Kabul.

Fast-forward to 1989. Exhausted by the American-backed mujahideen resistance, the Russians left Afghanistan. Amid chaos, several competing militias struggled for control of the capital, Kabul.

“My dad had a carpet store that did really well,” says Shafik Nawab, Anwar’s younger brother. At one point, one of the mujahid fighters demanded money from Shafik’s father. “When he refused to hand it over, he killed my dad,” Shafik says.

The murder convinced the family that Kabul was not safe. They sold the store and the remaining family members left Afghanistan. Shafik and his wife moved to Peshawar, accompanied by an agent they contracted with to get them to the U.S. Shafik’s son was born in Peshawar. After two



(l-r) Brothers Shafik Nawab and Anwar Naderpoor immigrated to the U.S. from Afghanistan. Now, Anwar owns Samira restaurant and Shafik is the owner of Turkuaz Café. Photo by Jim Krause

years, the family made their way to Mexico, crossing from Tijuana into the U.S. at the end of 1998.

Shafik and his family went to live for two months with Anwar in Indianapolis, working at the restaurant Kabul. “I also worked at an Italian restaurant, part time, for free,” Shafik says. “I worked to learn.”

In 1997, Anwar split with his business partner and started his own restaurant—Samira, in Bloomington. “I used to commute to Bloomington because my in-laws lived there,” he says.

Shafik joined his brother, helping to renovate the space and eventually working in the kitchen. After three years, he took on additional work at the PizzaX commissary and at the Gresham Eatery in the Indiana University food court, intending to raise money for a business of his own. He took factory work as well, while his wife, Marzia

Nawab, worked at the Gresham and as a cleaner at the Tulip Tree apartment complex. (Shafik took his wife’s surname when the couple married.)

Eventually Shafik and his wife raised enough funds to buy a small coffee shop on East 3rd Street across from the police station. The business became Turkuaz.

The brothers have looked for ways to help the new refugee families arriving in Bloomington after evacuating from Afghanistan in last year’s U.S.-run airlift. “I provided some food for them,” Shafik, 62, says. “I know how to make Kabuli palaw [an indigenous pilaf made from rice, raisins, carrots, and beef or lamb]. They feel at home.”

“A lot of ethnic restaurants in Bloomington couldn’t survive the pandemic,” Anwar, 63, relates. “We were very lucky to have the support of locals here.” ✨