

Brunch Update

Issue 85 - August 2016
Sufi Service Committee of Boston

Addressing the most pressing needs of our community



Robert and Carol Tedesco show their Sufi Service Committee invitations.

Sisia Daglia - Happenings

I participated in the Sufi Service Committee Sunday brunch service for the first time this past April. It was my first time doing this type of volunteer work. Mr. Mo Noorae thoughtfully orchestrated a joint ride with another volunteer, so my experience started with a new friendship. This was to become the theme of the entire event, connection and fellowship.

We arrived at the Sufi Center for breakfast and gathering of people and



supplies. Unlike most social experiences in New England, at the Sufi Center strangers introduce themselves to each other, look each other in the eye and smile, create a connection from the heart. It sounds quite normal, but isn't often the experience in similar settings in the Boston area. The breakfast was delicious, and shared amongst friendly conversation. Though there was a fair amount to coordinate before departing, the atmosphere was light, unhurried and humorous.

We left in separate cars for the first destination. Everyone participated in unloading the cars and organizing the food supplies, staging the kitchen for the next hour of food preparation before our guests arrived. It was this period when the work began that was most impressive to me. The quality of cooperation, understanding, and lack of individual self-promotion in the unfolding activities made a deep impression. For example, no one was fixated on having to do their particular task, nor was there rigidity in the way things were done. If eggs needed to be made into an omelette, the usual person who made it had an ease in letting someone else take over and do it a different way. This type of fluidity was evident throughout the morning. The goal was simply to serve our guests a nutritious and tasty meal.

I wished all work could be so enjoyable and amongst people who were being considerate of others more than themselves. Of course the food turned out delicious in such an atmosphere. When the guests did arrive, I felt the best part of the experience was sitting and partaking in food with everyone present, the fellowship was complete. I was sad to have to leave early, however full of energy and joy for the rest of the day. I definitely received more internally than I gave externally!

Sisia Daglian grew up near Detroit and has called Massachusetts home for the past decade-and-a-half. She loves design and textile arts, as a result found herself at Noor Oriental Rug store one day inquiring about rug cleaning, where Mr. Mo Noorae approached her about volunteering to help the homeless. Sisia has found Sufi Service to be a wonderful way to connect with others in the community and to connect with a better place in herself.



A pre-service breakfast of champions.

Please Join Us for the First Anniversary of the Sufi Service Committee Clothes Drive

Friday September 16, 2016
2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

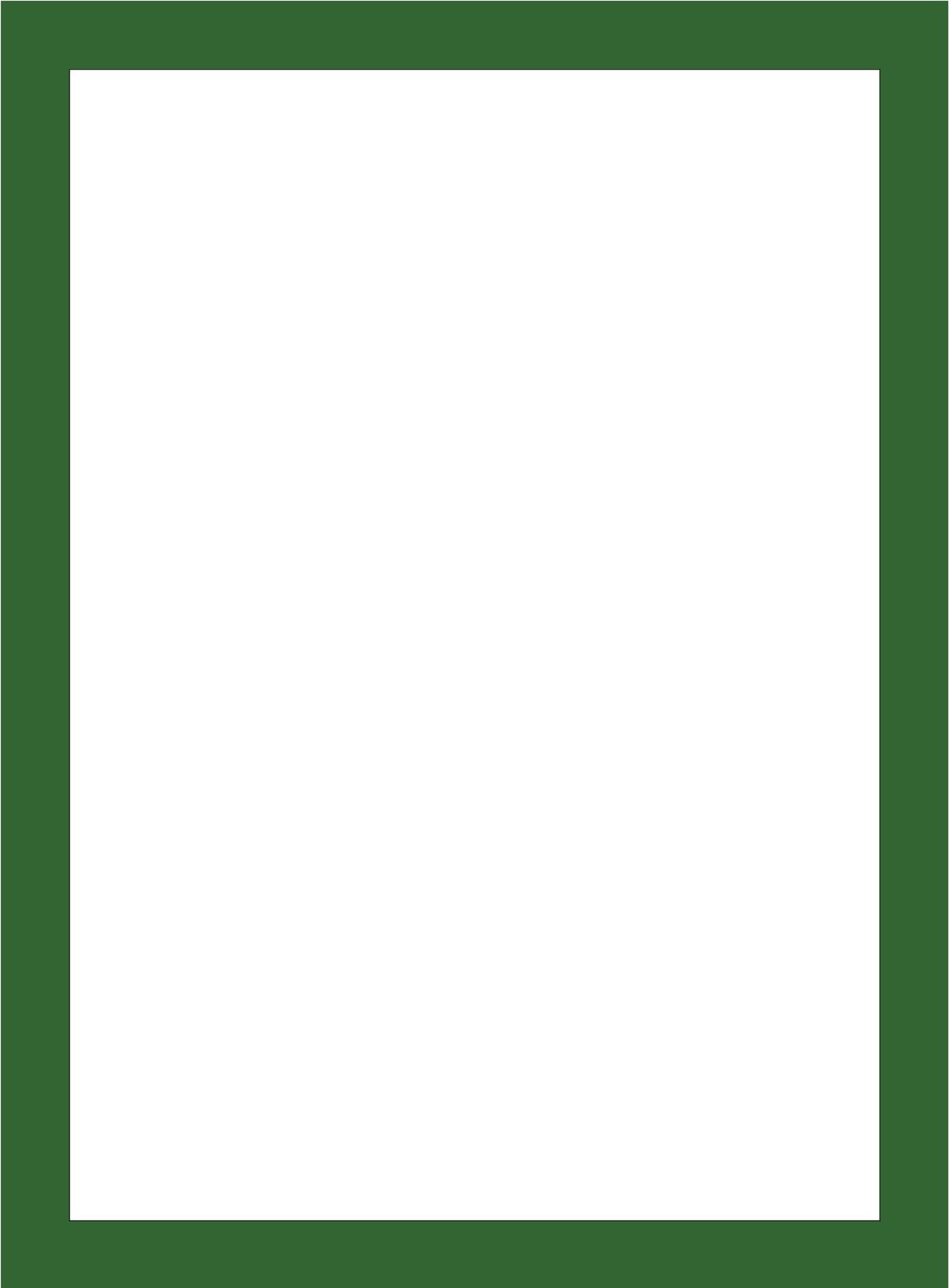
Noor Oriental Rugs, Inc.
769 Concord Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

Keynote address by
Cambridge Mayor Denise Simmons

As we enjoy the warmer seasons of 2016, we must not forget how the colder seasons affect the less fortunate homeless population in our neighborhood. Our aim is to provide warmer clothes to everyone in need as a new outfit may provide that boost in self-confidence needed by those struggling to improve their lives.



Cheryl at Appleton Cafe with her regular freshly baked donation.





Michael playing a rendition of Autumn Leaves on his saxophone.

[An Afternoon with Michael, Musician and Charity Service Volunteer](#)

An interview session with Michael at Pete's Coffee & Tea near Harvard University one Saturday afternoon proved to be both enlightening and uplifting. Michael had been volunteering with Sufi Service Committee for months. Mo Noorae, service manager, decided it would be fantastic to sit him down for a



conversation. Michael tells me that he is a retired schoolteacher, current storyteller, musician, and dedicated man of the arts. He tells me that he attended a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, where he majored in religion and minored in history. He also completed his Master's in the history of religion upon graduation and later acquired a Master's in Education. After his first master's, the military drafted him during the Vietnam War but he successfully pardoned himself as a conscientious objector. He found employment at an elementary school and after realizing that there was a scarcity of music instructors, Michael studied and taught music there for more than six years. He studied at Kodaly Musical Institute, a unique school in its method of teaching music through singing. At the same time, Michael decided to diversify his abilities even more. Starting in 1980, he learned and performed puppetry and, later, storytelling. Today, Michael uses those same skills to entertain and instruct through storytelling, music, and comedy.

As I mention his musical abilities, Michael reminds me that the word amateur comes from the latin word amatorem, meaning "lover of". As such, he considers his musical activities to fall in the realm of passion. After some light conversation, I decided to ask Michael a few specific questions about charity, music, and his motivation for what he does.

Q: What do you think of charity service generally and specifically?

Michael: I have a complicated relationship with it. I have of course played music for charity many a time. I used to regularly perform in Boston nursing homes and hospices, dozens and perhaps hundreds of times. I find the experience to be gratifying but difficult. It really depends on the mood. When I'm in the "higher" parts of me, I am unlikely to be disturbed by anything that happens...in that state, everything is positive. But of course it is very easy to slide into states of negativity, judgment, anger, and feeling neglected. Sometimes things happen at charity service that trigger these types of reactions. But when you perform music for money instead of charity, the audience is quiet, respectful, and listens because they had paid for a performance.

At a hospice or homeless shelter, people may not listen or pay attention, which is very frustrating. If I deal with a bad situation successfully, then I can transform a negative situation into a positive one, and I manage to enjoy myself anyway. I ask for help inside, from God, so as not to feel angry or rejected as I used to feel as a young man or as a child. I've changed quite a bit but you can slip back into negative thinking easily.

Of course, we don't know what these people are thinking or what they've

gone through. I have had short experiences of being poor and in various troubling circumstances so I can't judge these people too harshly.

Q: Are there particular songs or tunes that you play at a charity service that you wouldn't play elsewhere or vice versa?

Michael: Well, obviously I wouldn't play songs from the Depression that refer to poverty; I have to be careful about the theme. I wouldn't want to be singing about poverty, crime, or other sensitive subjects. I can play some Blues and laments [genres of music], but I don't like to bring up hurtful associations. "Oh Shenandoah" is one great folk song I play; one guy recently told me it was his favorite. The song tells the story of a man who's been trying to make his way out west, sailing on the Missouri river but actually longs to go back to Shenandoah. In some versions of the song, Shenandoah is the Shenandoah River or Shenandoah Valley in the state of Virginia, while in others, Shenandoah refers to a Native American chief, whose daughter the singer has fallen in love with.

Q: Were you attracted to the Boston House of Sufism for its charity service, or sufi teachings, or both?

Michael: Of course both, but it's noteworthy that I've had a long 50-year relationship with sufism. I actually first encountered sufi literature in college, but I encountered it practically during a rough patch in life. In 1987, I was struggling financially, using drugs, and miserably heart-broken over a woman. At that time, I fortuitously met an individual to whom I felt mysteriously attracted. He was a sufi and a college professor who helped navigate my soul through this tough time. The professor helped guide me career-wise and stabilized me philosophically. I had been addicted to drugs that were crippling my life but thanks to his influence I was soon drug-free and have been ever since. In addition to practical engagement, I also enjoyed sufi literature such the parables of Mulla Nasrudin as transmitted by the famous Sufi writer and lecturer Idries Shah. Those stories are incredibly humorous and teach wonderful lessons. Idries Shah started a school of sufism in England as one of the first sufi organizations in the West. I also read the teachings of Vilayat Khan who taught universal sufism in India before moving and teaching in the United States. I read another great sufi called Frithjof Schuon who elaborated and argued that the world religions were essentially expressions of the same source religion. Then there's Rene Guenon whom I heard about through his disciple, a Harvard professor named Seyyed Hossein Nasr. As such, I am well-versed in sufism, and volunteering through the Sufi Service Committee's charity initiative was a natural outgrowth of my involvement with the movement/philosophy over the years.

Q: What is your motivation for charity performance despite its difficulties?

Michael: I have a deep affection for Mo Noorae (Sufi Service Committee Manager). The story of how I first met him is kind of funny. I was listening to an old set of Quran recitation CDs that I had in the hopes that I would find the recitation moving. I, in fact, disliked the reciter's voice and decided to get rid of them. One day, I passed Noor Oriental Rugs in Cambridge, and knowing that Noor was an Arabic name for God (meaning Light), I figured the owner may be Muslim or Arab and therefore may want to take my set of CDs. Upon meeting Mo, I instantly felt a positivity flowing from him that I have sensed in every interaction with him since. He did not want to take the CDs but funnily enough was more interested in me than the gift. I would say that he greeted me as if he knew me, and ever since then, we have been friends. Volunteering with Sufi Service Committee is partially due to Mo, but I also think God guides me to it. I ask Allah often about what I should do for the day and the answer is often to go to the hospice or to a charity service.



Yellow and red peppers, broccoli, and baby carrots seasoned.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Sara and Lucky happily serving brunch.

Volunteers of all background are welcome to get involved by:

- Preparing and serving meals
- Donating and organizing clothes
- Providing administrative assistance
- Making financial contributions

Contact:
Mo Noorae

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