

Ahmed and Raffi's Hofbrau

Ahmed waxed the hall tiles below while I changed the ballast in a fluorescent fixture on the ninth floor of a building in San Francisco where I held a winter job as "superintendent of maintenance." A fancy title meaning I was a janitor.

Ahmed and Raffi were janitors too, recent green card immigrants from North Yemen before the country was unified. Between them they held four jobs. While Ahmed buffed floors in our building, Raffi collected tolls at the Universal Parking Garage a block away. At six p.m., they traded places. Their beds were in the boiler room in the basement of our building. They scrambled halfway around the planet to work hard for a dream, to earn enough to open their very own Arabic restaurant in San Francisco.

Ahmed hit the kill button on the floor buffer and watched my every twist of the wire nuts. When the ballast was installed and the bulbs were snapped back into place, I nodded, and he threw the switch. A slight flicker, then full wattage from the tubes bounced off his shiny floor. His teeth flashed against his black mustache. "You are an engineer, no G. D.?"

The three of us became weekend pals. I learned how to say "Allah has given us a great day" in Yemenese, and taught them how to interpret the comic strips in the Sunday *San Francisco Chronicle*. We wandered Marin County in my truck,

drinking Pepsi while they chose the mansions where they would live when their American dream came true.

After spring hit the great divide that year I went home to Idaho and tended hamburger on the hoof in the high country until the summer grass was gone and the trucks came to carry the cattle down onto the winter range.

That fall I found a job working with horses on a tax write-off ranch 40 miles north of San Francisco. On my first Saturday off, I rode a bus into the city and went to our building, where I found Raffi working the day shift. He was every excited to see me. "Ahmed has done the restaurant, G. D., Ahmed has done the restaurant. Go now to see him. Go to the Hofbrau." He pointed down the street.

Ahmed and Raffi had leased a German restaurant, Rolf's Hofbrau, complete with huge lighted signs of chesty women in dirmdls carrying steins of lager to chubby men in lederhosen who puffed on long-stemmed pipes. Inside the restaurant were thin, dark-eyed men in short-sleeve white shirts, holding cigarettes between ring and middle finger and drinking thick coffee from tiny cups.

When Ahmed spotted me, he came running from the kitchen, clapping his hands above his head. "G. D. is here! G. D. is here!" All of his customers stood. Ahmed introduced me to them one-by-one, and we shook hands. Each of them offered to buy

me a meal or a coffee or a cigarette.

But I was Ahmed's pal, in Ahmed's restaurant, and it was his privilege to place a feast before me, to sit with me and hold my hand and smile as I savored the saffron and pinon nuts and kebobs. The food was wonderful.

I asked him when he planned to let the rest of San Francisco know that he operated a very fine Arabic restaurant. When was he going to change the German decor on the outside of the building?

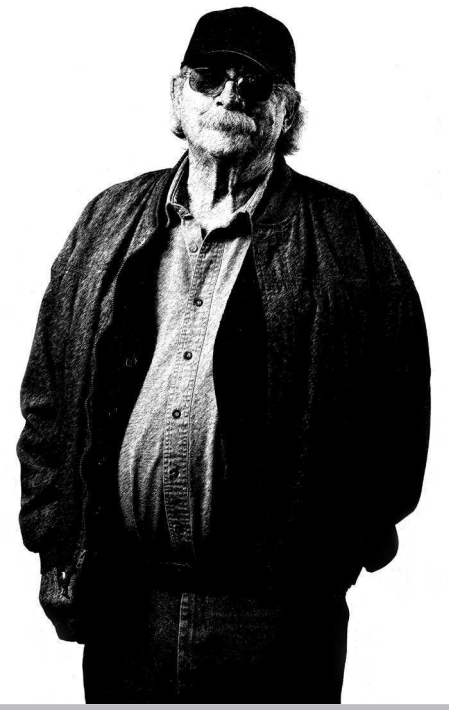
"Oh, no, G. D. If they know that this is an Arabic restaurant, someone who does not like us will bomb us. I have many Arabic friends, see? They all know that the restaurant is here. It is much safer to allow others to think that the Germans still own this place."

On the eve of the third winter I had a job editing a quarterly magazine across the bay in Sausalito. I rode the Golden Gate ferry to San Francisco, walked from the piers up Market Street and found the restaurant cold and abandoned. In gold script on the transom above the entry door was a small string of Arabic characters.

I walked to the original building, where I found Raffi sitting in the boiler room, lonely, sad and waiting for a ride to the airport. Five weeks before, on a Saturday night, Ahmed was caught in a sting.

The San Francisco chapter of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals lodged a complaint against the restaurant with the Department of Health, then accompanied Immigration and Naturalization on a raid of Ahmed's restaurant where they found Ahmed and three of his friends in the basement, butchering a recently killed lamb for the feast marking the end of Ramadan. Somewhere up the power chain, the INS overlapped with the SPCA. In an unusually short time, the government revoked Ahmed's

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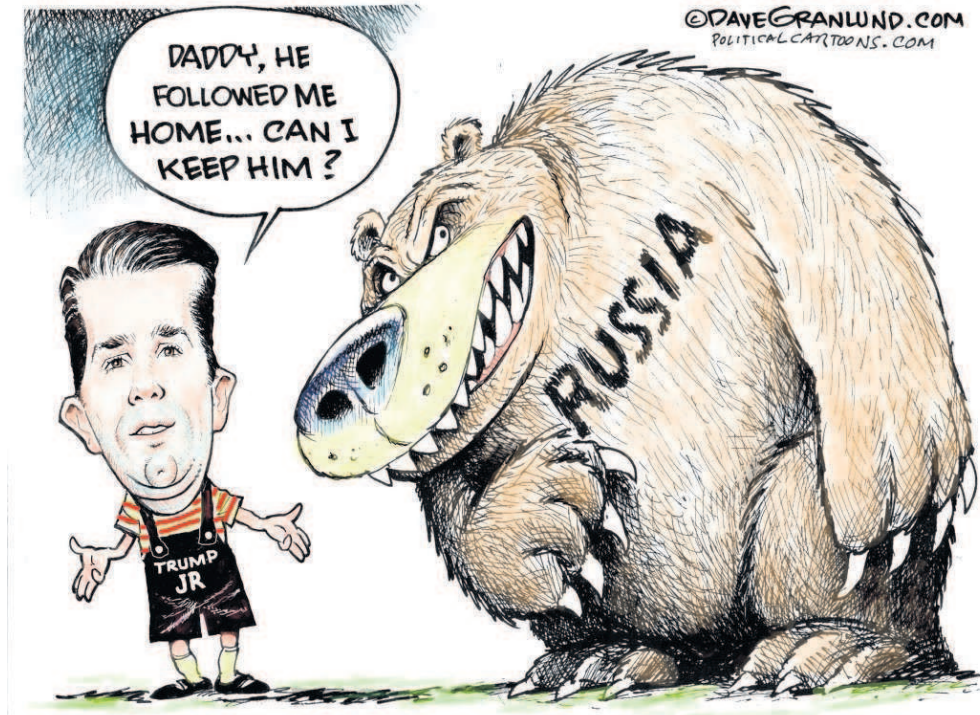


J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS
OF DRY CREEK

green card and deported him. Raffi had no recourse. He was flying back to North Yemen because he could not work all four jobs alone. As we hugged goodbye, Raffi said "You know, G. D., this America is a very bloody country. You come someday to live with us, O.K.?"

I asked him about the writing above the door at the restaurant. "Oh, yes, G. D. I have taken a picture of it to take home with me. It says Ahmed and Raffi's Hofbrau."

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.



A visit with the Rainbow Family

By GREG ALEXANDER
For The East Oregonian

With all the local attention being paid to the Rainbow Family gathering, my wife and I decided rather than take the word of others about the event we would see for ourselves. So, on Sunday, July 2, we drove to Seneca, the nearest little town to the gathering, about three hours south of Pendleton.

The cashier at Seneca's small general store gushed praise about their influx of visitors. Contrary to rumors about theft or damage to goods, she said there had been only good interactions with the campers. Business was clearly on an uptick and the owners weren't complaining.

We proceeded down several miles of country roads to the encampment. At the forest road turnoff a small contingent of law enforcement vehicles were parked and the road was dotted with no parking signs. The main parking area was full (though we managed to shoehorn a spot) and two auxiliary areas were filling up quickly. The descending dust from the road and trail traffic made it easy to spot which tired Datsuns and multicolored school buses had been in camp the longest.

The trek from the parking lot to the central meadow was probably a mile or more, though tents and tarps were tucked in among the trees all along the way. A remarkable distance when we considered how much material was packed in and out of the camp complex. All along the trail we were met with smiles and "Welcome home," despite our conspicuous lack of tie-dye clothing and dreadlocks.

After reaching the information tent, a rough central point of the site, we got a better sense of the layout and how large the encampment really was. An estimated 11,000 people were camped out that day and several thousand more expected.

Individual camps, with names like "Buffalo Tribe," "Nacho Mama," and "Home Shalom," were spread out across the landscape, linked by a network of trails. Each camp centered around a kitchen tent, and there were more than 80 of these. Larger community kitchens would feed anyone, smaller kitchens tended to just their own



One of the many signs around the Rainbow Gathering explaining community standards.

members. We tasted soup and stir fry in a couple kitchens and were offered tea at many others. The "Rough & Ready" kitchen was one of the most elaborate, with a rock and mud oven for baking. The vegan lasagna they were making for dinner smelled terrific.

There was a surprising amount of infrastructure, including miles of plastic water piping tied into a nearby spring. Toilet pits were dug well away from camps and kitchens. We also saw several massive teepees — larger than any at the Round-Up.

Workshops were offered in various camps and casual signage allowed anyone to sign up and teach what they knew. At "Green Path" we watched a demonstration on how to make sauerkraut and sprout grains.

The Granola Funk Theatre (backstage and all) hosted regular performances, and nearby was Spirit House, a reflective sanctuary where campers could display photos and remembrances of loved ones who had passed

on. Five hours was only enough time to visit perhaps a third of the encampment. As we were leaving, hundreds were gathering in the main meadow for the evening circle dance, the area where the entire Rainbow Family would converge two days later in a silent prayer for peace.

We talked to one longtime Family member on the way out. Campers take a lot of care to be good stewards of the land, he said. The idea that this was just one big party wasn't very accurate.

"This is not a festival," he pointed out. "This is a spiritual gathering. All beliefs are welcome, without passing judgment. I've seen God work here."

Greg Alexander is a Pendleton writer and editor of Eastern Oregon Parent magazine. He has already started a batch of homemade sauerkraut.

Quick takes

Local winners and losers in transportation package

This is what happens when you vote GOP on the eastern side of the state — you get reps that continually vote against your interests. And then you guys blame the "liberal west" for never getting anything done on the east side. Wake up. Enjoy your new fuel tax.

— Shane Parker

Extortion, if you don't vote the way we want you don't get any money.

— Colt Hubbell

There is no free lunch, or pork. Somebody has to vote yes. This is a hard lesson in natural consequences for the high country, but next time hopefully their representatives will admit that roads cost money.

— Joyce Cresswell

Eastern Oregonians cementing eclipse plans

Leaving Hermiston at 5 a.m. on the day of the eclipse and driving toward Baker City/Huntington area. Will be packing food and water for the day in case of bad traffic. I can't see gridlock on I-84 out here in the sticks.

— Chuck Saari

Painted Hills near Mitchell is right on the line and is viewed as the very best place to view the eclipse by NASA, NOAA, NWS and many other organizations.

— Levi Raber

Pendleton plans reinvigorated fireworks

This is what our city needs, go getters! I believe our city can pull together for next year and when I see those fire works go off I'll be thinking of Devan's huge contribution to make it all happen!

— Jamie Frear

It's just not the Fourth of July without fireworks. It's a shame more people don't find it important to donate to the purchase.

— Melissa Lynn Tucker Fisher

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

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