



When she was fifteen years old, Farah Walahi's smile widened at the sight of the flower market on her trip to Seattle with her father and sister. The endless Seattle rain had brought such vibrant and elegant flowers that she could not wait to hold near her. With the thick stems of a bouquet clutched between her hands, Farah looked up at her father beaming with bliss. "You really love those flowers, huh," he said to her. Even as she recalled the story to me, her eyes glistened in appreciation for the simple beauty and warmth of nature. An admiration for the way nature could so effortlessly deliver joy imprinted onto Farah's heart, even if she hadn't known it then.

"I brought you a gift," Farah said to me about forty five minutes into meeting each other. She lifted the beautiful red Nazar bracelet from her purse and handed it to me. "It's from Turkey," she says. This generosity is just one of the elements that drives her business. Farah Walahi is the owner of Flowers and Resistance, a floral design and art service in Los Angeles, California with a transformative impact. She offers floral bouquets, paintings, as well as set design and styling. Infused in every crafted collection of art is the heart of Afghan culture as her business works to support communities in Afghanistan. As a child of Afghan refugees, Farah grew up in a home infused with the rich virtues and traditions that follow Afghans, no matter where they may go. Unity, love, and hospitality were just some of the values that became central to Farah's life—values that seem to dance around her like beams of light each time she speaks about her passions.



Why Flowers?

“Flowers are used for milestones in your life,” she tells me. Red roses may remind you of a romantic gesture or you may have picked up sunflowers on your way to a friend's birthday party. She believes them to be a representation of community and compassion. Yet Farah’s work transcends even this understanding.

As a little girl, Farah would get lost in old art and poetry books stacked on her father’s bookshelf. She loved the way Afghan artists and poets have always preached universal love and connectivity to nature. Afghanistan is a country overflowing with benevolence, culture, and beauty. However, these images may not be what we imagine when we think of the Middle East. As our TV screens paint pictures of war, violence, and destruction, we often forget about the true experiences of the people who live behind these tropes, forgetting that war is not ‘normal’ or ‘inevitable’ in the Middle East. Vilifying countries like Afghanistan has put them into a rigid box, a perfect tactic to draw attention away from the West’s contribution to this image. “Love and nature is in our bones,” Farah tells me. Though ongoing narratives of Afghanistan portray scarcity and devastation, Farah

tells me just how important closeness to nature is to Afghan culture. From cobalt blue lakes to breathtaking mountains, underneath these deliberate misconstructions lay the abundant nature of Afghanistan, both in its environment and its people.

Finding Peace in Nature

Healing through creativity and love has been a focus point of Farah's business. When she first began, Farah recalls her walks through the flower market at 5:00am, despite not knowing where her business would lead her yet. Her belief in her intention and aspiration motivated her to get out of bed on those cold, early mornings. It was not only about the sales, but also about putting her true self into every piece she made. Though many people warned Farah against involving politics into her business, she knew that being authentic and speaking her truth would pay off. She understood that Flowers and Resistance was not only about politics, but also about teaching the soul of Afghan culture through the power of giving. Flowers became a powerful symbol of healing and humanizing communities in Afghanistan. While the Western world has become desensitized to the disruption of human lives in Afghanistan, Farah reminds us that, behind these 'inevitable' war torn depictions, are people who carry love, dreams, and passions as we do. Nature is deeply rooted in Afghan history, and her bouquets remind us that finding peace in beauty and nature is not diminished in a Middle Eastern country; if anything, the need for nature is strengthened and represents a means of connecting back to its vibrant roots.

How Flowers and Resistance is Making a Difference

Hand to Hand Sadaqah Group is a nonprofit organization created by Farah's father, Mohammad Raziq Walahi. Their mission is, first, a dedication to transparency to ensure sponsors that their money is going directly to those who need it. A percentage of Farah's proceeds from Flowers and Resistance go to her father's nonprofit organization. Their projects are focused on supporting communities in Afghanistan with job creation, medical assistance, groceries, etc., all depending on different families' needs. Most recently, Farah tells me that they organized a winter drive in which they provided families with winter essentials such as firewood, charcoal, winter clothes, and blankets. "This is what we are here for," Farah exclaims. Devotion oozes from her voice as her genuine desire to service others steers her words to every corner of the room that is now full of emphatic purpose. Her yearning to make others feel special symbolizes Afghanistan's ability to see and exude beauty, color, and love in all that is around them.



Moving Forward

Farah's voice has already traveled a large distance, delivering her flowers to Warner Brothers TV for actors Adhir Kaylan, Rosaline Elbay from Hulu's *RAMY*, and many others. Moving forward, she wants to continue bridging Afghan and U.S. cultures through her artistry. In a lot of ways, she sees herself as an educator and someone who is telling the truth through her love of flowers. Farah is dedicated to authenticity in the same way that she advocates for an honest representation of Afghan culture that dismantles the unbalanced hierarchy between the West and the Middle East. Currently, her passion projects include building a deaf school in Afghanistan in the future as well as building a medical clinic in Herat, the third largest city in Afghanistan. Farah hopes her flowers serves as a constant reminder of the richness and connectivity of Afghanistan's equally colorful heritage.