

THE NEWSTAR

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PHOTO BY: MOHAMMAD HOMAYOON SARVARI

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FUNNY AFGHAN SUPERSTITIONS

Many Afghans are superstitious people who believe that certain actions are not devoid of significance. For instance, when someone drinks water from a glass that another person already drank from, it means that these two people will fight. Another example is that if someone's feet touch the broom while someone is sweeping, it will cause slander. Another funny superstition is that if somebody's feet collide with another person's feet while walking, these two will probably fight, but they can prevent the fight if they shake hands with each other. Furthermore, some Afghans believe that if their right hands itch they will receive money, but in contrast, if their left hands itch they will lose or spend that money. If someone kisses somebody's forehead, that person will travel to another country. Last but not the least, when a girl gets married, the mother of the bride will give her a green scarf, and after the bride uses it and another single girl wears it, then that single girl will marry soon. Indeed, most of these beliefs are remnants from the past, but many Afghans still strongly agree with them. Some of these superstitions may sound weird or unbelievable, but in my opinion, if we attach positive energy to something then the result will be the same as we hope. For example, if we have an exam and pessimistically think that we cannot pass the exam, then for sure we cannot pass. When someone gives all his or her consideration and energy to something, then the result will be the same as he or she expects, whether positive or negative.

Lima Habib
ICP



AFGHAN TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Afghan culture has many beautiful sides that make Afghanistan a unique country. As an Afghan girl, I would like to introduce three parts of my culture: clothing, marriage traditions, and etiquette.

As Afghanistan is an Islamic country and the majority of people are Muslim, people have developed different ways to wear the hijab. For example, some women wear scarves that fully cover their hair, but others don't cover their hair fully. Most people wear traditional clothes. For example, women wear gande afghani, and men wear perahan tanban. People wear gande afghani at weddings because they believe that it is an important part of their culture.

There are different marriage traditions among different ethnic groups living in Afghanistan. Most marriages are arranged marriage because Afghan parents believe that if their daughter or son has an arranged marriage they will have a better life than if they have a love marriage. However, love marriages also happen in Afghanistan where boys and girls fall in love and talk to their parents to reach each other. Moreover, in Afghanistan it is traditional for a boy's family to go and ask for the girl's hand (khastegari). Parents buy flowers with sweets before going to the girl's house, and if the girl accepts the boy, they are engaged. Many people believe that girls and boys should be engaged for at least one to two years in order to know each other better and be ready to marry.

Etiquette in Afghanistan is as unique as its culture. People communicate differently depending on their gender. When women meet each other, they hug and kiss each other's cheeks at least three times and say hello. Men shake hands and touch each other's faces, but they do not kiss. When a person is sitting and someone comes home, the sitting person stands and says hello. If they do not do so, that person is considered impolite. Moreover, most people kiss their parents' or grandparents' hand because they believe it's one part of being polite.

Every country has its own culture, and that is what makes the world beautiful. Most common traditions that we can see differences in countries are their clothes, marriage, and the way they communicate with each other. Afghanistan is unique because of its clothing in the world. People use their cultural clothes which are gande afghani and perahan tanban (traditional cloth). Moreover, parents believe that arranged marriage brings a better life for their children. Also, people used to kiss the elder's hand in order to show their respect to them.

Hawa Taban
ICP

THE BLACK-WHITE AFGHANISTAN

Sit on a smooth beanbag
And turn-on the TV
The changing channels
And the fatigue of your eyes
Bring lassitude
Wait,

The anchor broadcasts the newscast about
The perilous landlocked Afghanistan
Put your hands on your ears
The sound of bombings and shootings is so
So loud...!

The color of blood is the same
As the color of the big bean bag
The pathetic woman is running, with no shoes
For her little baby is inside the fire
In the explosion
Rifle
Blood
shriek
What is more?

There is nothing more! Says the media.
This burning land is accustomed
To the kid, never returned from school
To the patient, never returned from hospital
To the father, never returned from work
Shut the television off!

Close your eyes
And pray for humanity, for equity
Pray for PEACE...

Who is wrong and who is right?
Nobody knows

Pack your luggage to proceed the daring venture
From Afghanistan to Afghanistan
One in the small box and the other,
Is the land of hospitality

Welcome to Afghanistan, the home of Maulana!
This is my beloved country!

The most relaxing place on earth where:

The saffron tea is tastier than wine
The grandma's house is calmer than café
The cotton mattress is more comfortable than
sofa

And where Attan is more beautiful than Zumba
Here,

Mother forces you to eat more
Father buys you choori in Eid
Neighbors greet you every day in alley
Kids call you "Khala" or "Kaka"

Here,

People are hospitable
Regions are picturesque
Rivers are shining

And Life is unadorned and beautiful!

Zainab Amirzai
Eco



PHOTO BY POPAL MUMTAZ

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN AFGHAN AND KYRGYZ CULTURES

As an Afghan it was not hard for me to write about the differences and similarities between Afghan and Kyrgyz cultures because there are lots of different ethnicities living in Afghanistan and one of them is the Kyrgyz people. I am from south Afghanistan, and when I came to Bishkek, I learned that much of our cultures, food, and language are the same. When I called my father "Ata" in front of my Kyrgyz friend, she said, "You made me happy by using our word." I responded, "No, we also call our father Ata." Even when I use my language to communicate with people in Bishkek, we understand each other well. I saw Kyrgyz plov and chorba during my first week of living in Bishkek and thought of how we also have palaw or qabili and Shorba with the same ingredients and flavor in Afghanistan. One thing that makes me very happy is that both countries have qorots or korots, and I will not miss qorot in Bishkek. Later on, I saw some pictures and videos of a Kyrgyz friend's sister's engagement and saw that it was completely the same as engagements in our culture. In south Afghanistan, when a girl gets engaged her mother in law throws a scarf on her head and gives her a gold ring or earrings as a gift, just like in Kyrgyzstan. One special similarity that connects Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan is the way

that old women dress and behave in Bishkek, which reminds me of my grandmother and all the old women in my region. For example, there is a kind of traditional shoe that both Afghans and Kyrgyz called kalosh.

Of course, there are some differences between the cultures of Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. In Afghanistan, when we go for dinner in someone's house, they insist that you have a lot to eat even if you are full, but in Kyrgyzstan they pack the meal and give it to you while you are leaving the house. Another difference between the cultures of Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan is the way the men in Afghanistan dress, which is completely different from the men in Kyrgyzstan. One of the biggest differences between my country and Kyrgyzstan is the peace and the independence of women. Afghanistan doesn't have peace, and women cannot treat themselves as they want, but in Kyrgyzstan almost 70% of shopkeepers are women and engaging in businesses.

Both countries are beautiful with their own cultures and differences, and we respect and love them.

Farkhunda Rasooli

ICP



HOW TO SEE AFGHAN CULTURE DAY

When you are away from your country and your people, you may miss your motherland and your culture. This is how I felt in my first year in Bishkek. By familiarizing myself with AUCA's policy, I understood that my university respects cultural diversity. Several events are dedicated to diversity and seek to unite students to learn about different cultures.

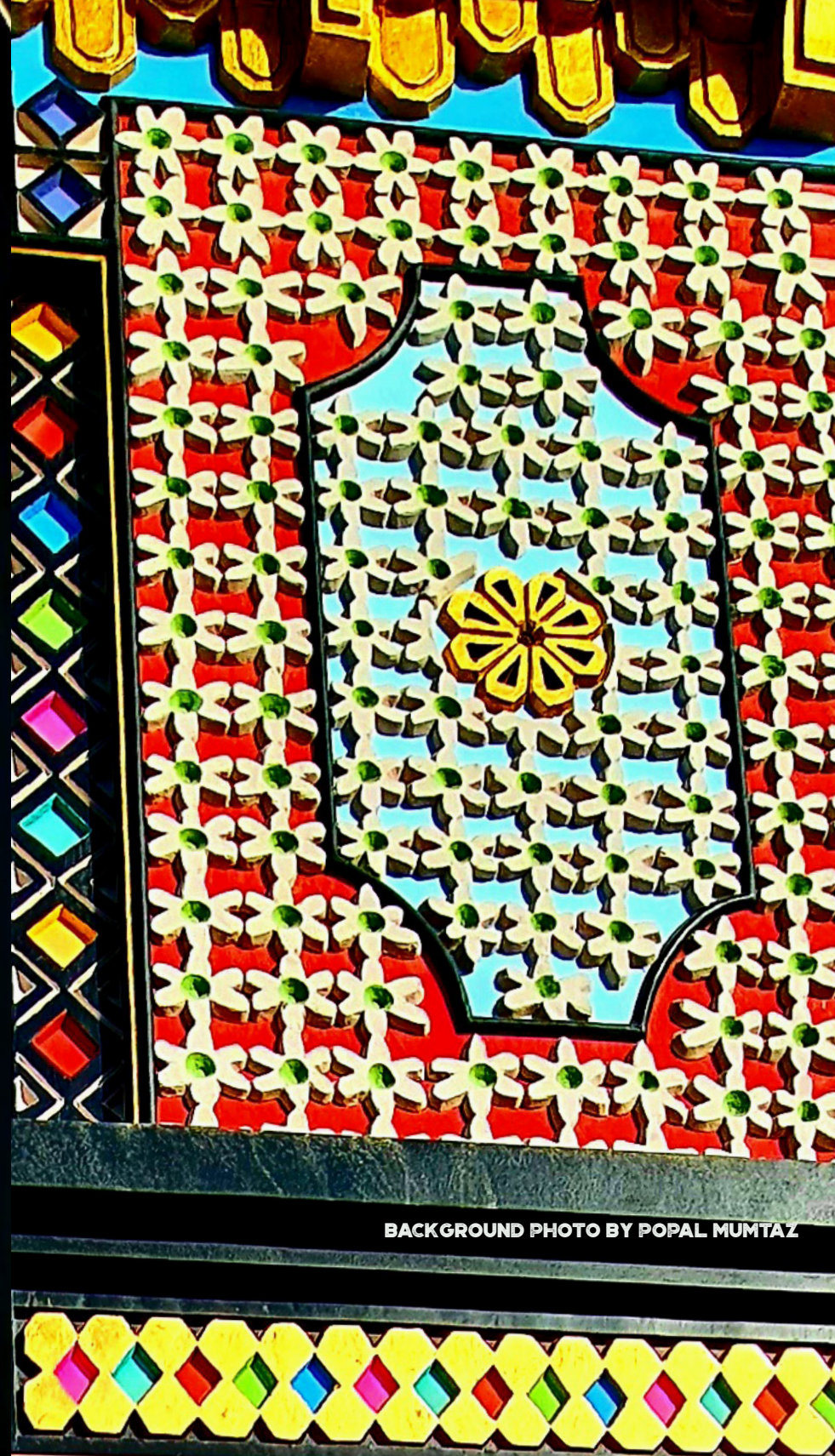
However, due to the epidemiological situation, celebrating these events is currently impossible. This prevents freshmen students from feeling AUCA spirit but lets us be more positive as even we cannot all come to the campus. Thus, I strongly believe that this topic will make you smile and see the beauty of Afghan Culture Day.

I have never been to Afghanistan, but when I think of it I see beautifully dressed young girls with unusual jewelry, magnificent music, and fascinating dances. AUCA celebrates this colorful event every year, and students, especially girls, bring traditional food and cookies. Spring gives a chance to celebrate outside, which makes this day more special. The field is full of canopies, with traditional dresses and pieces of jewelry where every student can learn more about Afghan culture, Games, and dances bring a captivating atmosphere where everyone feels happy. No holiday can be joyful without singing songs, and. Afghani songs have unusual features that make me imagine mountains and a shepherd singing when I hear them.

Afghan Culture Day is a collaboration between students and the International Students Office and seeks to make AUCA's students more aware of Afghani culture and traditions by giving us the feeling of having spent a day in Afghanistan.

Mehrangezkhon Azimova

JMC



BACKGROUND PHOTO BY POPAL MUMTAZ



TAKEN FROM AUCA NEWS.KG



HOW I SEE AFGHAN CULTURE

I have never been to Afghanistan and do not have Afghan relatives, but I am deeply in love with Afghan people. The reason is simple—for the more than six years that I worked with students from Afghanistan, we went through many things together and shared so much fun, pain, excitement, and frustration that they became like a second family to me.

I was born in Dushanbe and spent my childhood in Tajikistan. Tajik and Afghan people have a lot in common—languages, culture, and appearance. Our origins are the same. Moreover, at home I had Afghan neighbors, and as an AUCA freshman I lived with an Afghan fellow whose knowledge about the culture of Afghan people was helpful for me to begin working with students from Afghanistan.

In February 2015 I joined the AUCA team as Afghan Student Coordinator and my adventures began. The job included many aspects: recruitment of scholarship recipients, program logistics, medical and visa assistance, advising and support, extracurricular activities, and various other processes.

In the beginning, the number of students was not that high: a bit over 50 people, most of whom were women. As I never met the majority of them, remembering that many names was a challenging experience. To avoid any confusion, I dedicated 15-20 minutes a day to a game: I spread the passport photos that were needed for visas on the table and tried to guess the names of the people in the pictures. A couple of weeks playing the “name game” was helpful. This made me really happy, and I guess the students had positive emotions too. Imagine: the door opens and a person who never met you comes in. You turn to her and say: “Hello, Saida/Farah/Fatima, nice to see you.” The person smiles: you both now have the feeling that you know each other. Here is when the personal attachment begins.

Several students in junior and senior years were super helpful, especially in the beginning—they offered help in gathering students, communicating concerns, announcements, and activity initiation.

I will never forget the experience of meeting new kids at the airport. As students from Afghanistan do not speak the local language, the first trip is usually fully supervised by a coordinator, and they are picked up at Manas Airport after arrival at 4 in the morning. The first eight students arrived a couple of weeks after my appointment—a male and seven female students who had just joined AUCA. We spent a lot of time with that group—their exploration of the country, university, and program requirements coincided with the time I began diving into my job’s responsibilities and started building relations with the students. The second experience of meeting new students happened shortly thereafter—summer 2015, when 40 new program participants arrived in Bishkek. The ladies and gentlemen of the first cohort that I supervised from their first days have already graduated, but I remember them as they were on the first day: young, excited, smiling, tired, and a bit shaggy.

One of my responsibilities is visa extension and registration. As Afghan students mostly come to AUCA together in cohorts of scholarship recipients, the day of visa extension for these groups is usually shared. “Visa” sounds boring, but it is not at all. I would say “painful” instead. Have you ever carried a package with 60+ alphabetically sorted passports in your one hand and a bunch of documents for three governmental divisions in another (a total of 15 pages per person that you were manually preparing a night before, spreading the papers on tables, chairs, the floor, and your own cat to organize those properly?), through crowds of nervous people, holding the money for the visa fee somewhere between your teeth? If not, you should try—the adrenaline that you get will be worth it. Especially when someone accidentally bumps into you and your carefully sorted pages fall down, mixing in a complete mess, and the turn you’ve been waiting half a day for in order to submit the documents is next (hello, my first visa extension day!).

Before we hired an additional doctor, medical assistance was taking up nearly one third of the working time. We went through many issues with students, and now it is hard to remember the number of midnight hospital visits, ambulance calls, teeth healed, X-rays taken, specialists visited, and blue shoe covers worn. We had tons of crazy photos with medical equipment (did you know that

the special hat with electrodes used for electroencephalogram makes you look like an alien?), and kilograms of chocolates eaten together after blood tests and hospital checkouts. One of my favorite memories—during my first year of work, there was a student who was afraid to visit the dentist. In front of the clinic, we had a preparation briefing, and it was agreed that during the procedure I would talk to him to focus his attention on something else. I guess that day I had shaped the whole first season of *Walking Dead* into a story by the time the tooth was finally filled. In a couple of days I got a message: “Thanks, ma’am, the tooth is great. Can you recommend something like *Walking Dead* to watch? I have just finished the last season!”

I will never be tired of speaking about interesting, challenging, and joyful memories we had with students, but this is not the main thing that makes them special. The main reason to love them is their personalities—kind hearts, smiling faces, their dedication to studies and development, goals and dreams that they work hard for. They never forget to thank you, do not hesitate to hug, and are always ready to laugh.

Afghan people are very active, and I personally gain a lot from them. I am proud to say that since 2016 students from Afghanistan have been representatives in the student senate each year. They actively participate in internships, exchange programs, and conferences. Every year we are happy to report about students’ high grades to the scholarship administration. Many Afghan students are known for colorful exhibitions, beautiful concerts, poetry evenings, and delicious meals during Diversity Week’s food day. One thing worth mentioning more about food (as this is what we all love greatly)—if you never have tried it, make sure you do next time: Qabeli palaw (Afghan pilaf), manto (Afghan manty) and sherpera (sweets with milk and nuts) are the best.

The majority of the students are very eager to learn about local culture. Those who spent over two years here speak basic Russian and Kyrgyz. Knowing the language is very important to communicate with people beyond the campus walls. The first months for students are always difficult, as they need to learn quickly how to talk in shops, marshrutkas, and rented houses. Thus, thanks to the preparatory program, teachers, local friends, and students’ hard work, most of them start greeting me in Russian (“zdravstvuyte”) within the first weeks of their stay in Kyrgyzstan. The adaptation period has not only harsh moments but funny ones too: back in 2015, when a student and I were walking in downtown, she told me a story about her first fast-food order in the local café, when she was putting her fingers above the forehead to show a cow and saying “give me a moo-oo bulochka” (to order a beef burger).

In six years of working with the Afghan community, I learned a lot. How to organize time, how to solve problems, how to be happy about simple things like a “thank you” sticker on the desk or a student who is singing a beautiful ethnic song to you during a Zoom meeting. I have many friends among my current and former students. All work-related stress easily disappears when the community supports you, calls you “sister” or “mum,” shares warm words, and offers help any time you are organizing activities. Thanksgiving Day? Many words of gratitude come as postcards, messages, and hugs. Women’s Day? Flowers and invitations to women’s rights meet-ups organized by students. Birthday? Hundreds of heartwarming wishes. When you are in touch with people for almost the whole day (until 5 as an administrator, and afterwards as a friend or adviser), it is hard to abstract yourself from them, and thus I can hardly imagine a day without interactions with my “kids.” Even though I am not a fan of work-related conversations during the evening or free time, friendly talks and discussions of hobbies, films, and personal matters often happen any time of the day. In sum, I would say that even if my job may not be the best in the world, it is surely one of the best for me personally.

Ekaterina Sanamians

Afghan and Tajik Students Coordinator



PHOTO BY POPAL MUMTAZ

I joined AUCA in 2018 as the Assistant to the Coordinator of Afghan students and left my job in January of this year. Previously, I had worked in governmental agencies. However, I had always wanted to work in the realm of education with people from different corners of the world. Thus, I was fortunate to get a job in the International Students' Office, where I worked with students from various countries.

My work consisted of forging connections with Afghan students in the Kyrgyz Republic from their first days in Bishkek. I greeted them on their arrival at the airport, guided them throughout their study period, helped them deal with our Kyrgyz and AUCA bureaucracy, and led them through their graduation.

As I started working here, I sincerely fell in love with my students and my work. AUCA has a very friendly atmosphere. Afghan students were kind and open, always eager to help if needed. We discussed all sorts of interesting topics and listened to each other's opinions. Participating in the organization of events and meetings as well as working with government agencies enriched my experience and facilitated my own professional development.

AUCA's Afghan students actively participate in Diversity Week every year and represent Afghanistan in a very colorful way. Especially at the food day their offerings are always delicious. I highly recommend you to try the delicious dessert sherpera, made with milk and nuts.

I remember how we organized Afghan Cultural Day in 2019. It was great fun rehearsing with the students until late at night. The students were great; after their classes they spent a lot of time on rehearsals, even if they were tired. During the rehearsals, I learned Afghan dances with our girls, so I can dance whenever I want to remember my days at AUCA. I fell in love with Afghan songs. There are several Afghan songs on my playlist that I still love to listen to today: Mozhdah Jamalzadah's "Watanim," and of course several Attan songs.

It was very difficult to leave AUCA because I did not want to abandon my students and colleagues, who became like family to me. But I am very happy that I had the opportunity to get to know them and work with them. I hope I can remain friends with all my colleagues and with our wonderful students and alums.

In the end I would like to thank my students and colleagues for having me and wish them to achieve their dreams, work hard, laugh loud, and make Afghanistan a land of peace and prosperity.

Perizad Meikinbek





This page of the Afghan Cultural issue is dedicated to our beloved graduate Afghan student Fatima Khalil (Natasha), who was killed on June 27, 2020 in a bombing attack in Kabul, Afghanistan. Below are some words written by the martyred Fatima's sister and some close friends.

May her soul rest in peace! We will not forget you, Fatima.

Niloufar Rafat

Editor-in-Chief

"Have I ever told you I feel I belong to Mars?"

Susurrus with Fatima Khalil

Is it fair, Natasha?

The 231 days, my Nati (Natasha), that we have not spoken—is it fair? But I have talked to you every single day and apologized to you many times a day. You have not responded to anything I have said. Is it fair? I have begged you many times, have cried nonstop and hoped nonstop to feel your essence. Is it fair? You are making me do your job by making Mana (mother) laugh, by talking to your one million friends because they miss you and they think I look like you and sound like you, so this gives them a little comfort, and by dreaming about your murder every night, is it fair? I am assuming that you are telling me that nothing about this is fair. Murdering you was not fair; diminishing your dream of becoming the UN Secretary-General was not fair; destroying your wish of opening the first Afghan dance school was not fair; taking the hopes of your friends was not fair, and killing your generation was not fair. Nothing is fair!

My sister, the world has become a more horrible place since you left, especially Afghanistan. Every day people are murdered. Many young people like you have been murdered in the same way they killed you. No one is taking responsibility, and no one is apologizing to them or their broken families. Everyone is busy bringing peace to Afghanistan. Yes, you heard it right; there is a peace process going on, my sister. Can you imagine Afghanistan as a peaceful place? Dyan Muzarana writes, "Justice is a process, not an outcome." Our leaders and the world are looking for an outcome, not justice. I cannot see peace happening, my sister, because we have not learned from history or any other conflict. After all, there are so many broken hearts. There will be political settlements, but there is no healing.

The ones who killed you and thousands more and are still murdering every day to protect Islam, a religion that is supposed to serve human beings not be served at the expense of human lives.

Natasha (Fatima Khalil) and thousands like her are killed every day. Still, we are told that this strengthens our resolve to making Afghanistan an economically developed country and a peaceful hub for the region. Whose peace and whose development? I believe, my sister, we will not be in peace even if Afghanistan becomes a heavenly developed country as long as broken hearts are not healed. Until someone takes responsibility, until power-hungry leaders apologize.

Lima Halima Ahmad

Fatima Khalil's sister



It is still hard to believe that Natasha is not with us anymore. Loud and sincere, she could dance like no one was watching, speak to make others hear, and was oriented towards development. She was an activist, a feminist, and a beautiful soul who is missed greatly.

For me, she will always remain my strong, beautiful little girl. She could always find a proper word to make a person feel special. She was a true leader and the best illustration of our program's success. Full of energy, motivation, and dreams, that is our Natasha. She was never too shy to say what she felt, and her words were full of love. She was loved back. She is loved.

Ekaterina Sanamians
Afghan and Tadjik Students Coordinator



I knew Natasha from High School in Kabul, and we became very close friends in Bishkek; at AUCA, we became best friends. She was a very caring and beautiful woman. I loved her the way she was. She was full of love and energy. She wanted to enjoy life as much as she could. She always said that she didn't want to regret one day that she couldn't do what she wanted to do because of how others might have judged her or thought about her.

Natasha was very fearless and brave. She always spoke her mind and was never afraid to tell the truth, and yet her heart was so soft and delicate, she never held any grudges inside! She was revolutionary! She always fought for women's rights. She showed me how the world is so unfair towards women and how we should

all acknowledge it and start doing something about it. Her love and care towards women and women's rights were just unconditional!

She made me know my worth as an Afghan woman, and she taught me how to treat myself better. She would tell my mistakes to my face whether I liked it or not. She was an honest and caring soul!

I miss her so much, I will always miss her, and there will always be an emptiness in my heart, but she would be very happy if we start loving and treating ourselves better. She always said, "Life is simple, but we insist on making it difficult."

Rest in Power, Nati <3

**Yours,
Faryal**

"Have I ever told you I feel I belong to Mars?"

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