

HOUSE OF SUFISM KN

CONTENTS

Updates ..... 2

Love and Be  
Loved ..... 3



*Bill and the Egg Department*



*Close-up of stewed chicken*



*Adam and Peter serve up a wholesome meal for our guests.*

*The path of enlightenment converges with our basic instinct of empathy and altruism.*

*- Dr. Alireza Nurbakhsh*



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## Spreading Joy throughout the Winter

For many, the holiday season is a time to spend visiting the warm homes of loved ones for parties and celebrations. But for some these cold winter days can be very difficult times. House of Sufism has been involved with a number of efforts to touch the lives of the less fortunate with joy and love.

This winter, House of Sufism has continued to deliver food and donated goods throughout the Boston area to show love to our needy friends. Our Sunday brunches provide food and cheer to the residents of the Washington Street shelter in Boston's South End. Through these meals, dozens of volunteers shared their joy and good cheer with our friends through the cold months. Volunteers have also maintained and expanded our weekday deliveries, which bring baked goods from bakeries to food pantries throughout the Boston area.

In addition, House of Sufism continued its tradition of providing "winter wish" cards to the needy. Despite a dip in donations, we accomplished our goal of giving \$25 gift cards to Target to over forty people. The responses were enthusiastic and happy. Many came home with winter clothing. One man, proudly holding up his new sweater, confided that he had worn the same outfit for the past four years. He was truly grateful for the gift card he had received.

Providing Target gift cards is particularly special to House of Sufism because it expands our normal charity operations, which ordinarily consist of serving food to those in need. As one House of Sufism volunteer noted, while the poor people of Boston might not die of starvation, they may very well die from depression and sadness. The chance to go shopping at Target was for many very uplifting, a chance to enjoy a sense of liberty and autonomy.

We thank all donors who provided funds for the gift cards. Donations came from members of House of Sufism and from customers of Noor Oriental Rugs. We wish much love, happiness, and even more love for everyone during 2014.



*Daniel wowed us with his extra special pancakes, made of an impressive variety of organic, vegan ingredients.*



# Love and Be Loved

To the hundreds of people she has served brunch through House of Sufism Charity Initiative, Andrea is probably just another volunteer serving scrambled eggs with a pleasant smile. They are likely unaware that this woman with platinum blond hair and a calm, motherly demeanor is a skilled alchemist with over seventy years of experience transforming her personal struggles into the joy of others. That's why we were so pleased that Andrea agreed to share with us her remarkable story that led this self-described "Christian with a small 'c'" to start volunteering with House of Sufism.

The struggles of Andrea's childhood laid the foundation for a life in service to others. Her early childhood home in New Hampshire lacked electricity and running water. Her family had outhouse and used an icebox to refrigerate their food. At eight years old, she moved to a log cabin in New Jersey. Andrea explained that "things were tight, but there were good things." Her stepfather, an auto mechanic, would barter his skills for fresh tomatoes and milk from nearby farms. They'd buy day-old bread from the supermarket. She would ride her bike to the local library and read three to four books per week. There were always Christmas presents. But her mother's struggle with alcoholism put an emotional strain on the family, eventually causing it to split up. Andrea moved back to New Hampshire to live with her father. It was there that Andrea, still a teenager, took refuge in what would become a lifelong passion: service to others.



*Andrea serving a slice of her 70th birthday cake to Mary.*

Her first "social action" was starting a Sunday school for poor children. Many children in the area were desperately impoverished, living off little more than biscuits and gravy. In rural New Hampshire, she explained, life "was week to week – nobody could save any money." Andrea would serve the children refreshments and teach them about the bible. And through that service to others she found a sense of contentment and purpose.

A few years later, Andrea was offered a full tuition scholarship to Syracuse University. Around the same time, however, Andrea started to struggle with depression, which would prove to be a lifelong nemesis. Yet she found that volunteer work provided a way to transform her negative feelings into joy. She explained: "Whatever I didn't have in my life, I strove to get it. So I understand the pain of others." In other words, Andrea has spent her life transforming deprivation into opportunity, both for herself and for others.



“I was happy as a child because I was accomplishing something. I don’t remember wishing for more than I had.”

At twenty-one, she signed up with Volunteers in Service to America (today AmeriCorps VISTA) to serve as a “liaison social worker” in a community of black rural families in Florida. Among her accomplishments was starting a community newsletter, organizing a parade, and securing street lights for the community. Perhaps the highlight of her work was organizing domestic workers. These women had been struggling to make ends meet because they were getting paid just \$1 for their hourly wages. Andrea set up an employment agency and told the workers to demand a \$1.25 for their work (then the minimum wage). The strategy worked, and that 25% increase in pay went a long way toward alleviating the community’s poverty.

Andrea later found teaching to be a good channel for her enthusiasm for helping others. There are two memories of teaching that bring a smile to Andrea’s face to this day, not because she achieved something great, but because they serve as a reminder that all people when given a chance are capable of extraordinary accomplishments. The first happened at the end of her six months teaching a GED class on the Blackfeet Indian reservation in Browning, Montana. One of Andrea’s students was over fifty years old and had gone through only the 8th grade. He hadn’t set foot in a classroom for

years and passing the GED is the equivalent of graduating from high school. With the aid of Andrea’s patience and determination, that man was able to pass the exam by just one point. Another lasting memory is of an Ecuadorian mother with two children and a 4th grade education who not only passed the GED but also managed – despite the odds – to become a licensed practical nurse. These stories exemplify the importance of transforming our own negativity into joy through persistent service to others.

After graduating from college, and subsequently serving in a number of other positions as part of the War on Poverty, Andrea took a position in the operations department at MassHealth, where she worked for over twenty years. This position entailed working with medical providers serving low-income patients in Massachusetts. After retiring in 2006, Andrea spent the next three volunteering her mornings to teach basic literacy and math skills at Action for Boston Community Development. She subsequently began volunteering on the fundraising committee for Spare Change News, a street newspaper published through the Homeless Empowerment Project. Today, Andrea is the secretary of the board. She admires the organization’s mission of empowering the less fortunate.

And so how did this remarkable life of service lead to volunteering with House of Sufism Charity Initiative?

“I was bribed with an oriental rug,” she explained, chuckling. One fateful day, Andrea’s fundraising efforts led her to have tea and cookies at the rug shop of a volunteer from House of Sufism Charity Initiative. Curious, Andrea decided to volunteer at the Sunday brunch. She found the work energizing, joyful and uplifting – and she came to see House of Sufism as a new community, a new home. After years of volunteering, she has recently joined the charity initiative’s board. Her first idea? “The volunteers are often so busy they don’t have time to talk with people. There’s some interaction, but I want more.”

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Now in her seventieth year of life, this lifelong volunteer has decided to go by the nickname “Andy.” She explained that the new name, like the House of Sufism, is charged with a kind of youthful energy. It is thus that Andrea – or Andy – serves as an example to us all: despite personal challenges, we must live with our hearts open to others, give freely and expect nothing in return, transmute our pain into joy for others.

Love and be loved.



## How to get involved

1. Volunteer! It is a time commitment of only two hours: 2-4 PM on Sundays. Help us cook and clean or just spend time with our friends!
2. Monetary donations: If you would like to make contribution to House of Sufism Charity Initiative, you can write a check (payable to KN), use any credit card, or wire money through PayPal. All your donations are tax-deductible.

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