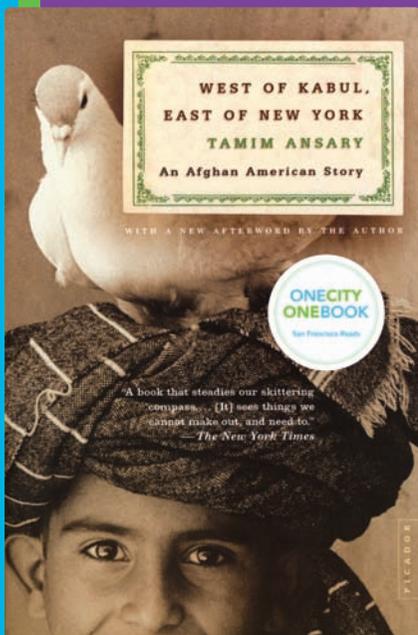


ONECITY ONEBOOK

San Francisco Reads



Fall 2008

A Citywide Book Club
sfpl.org

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Ansary compound, Kabul, Afghanistan



A message from Mayor Gavin Newsom

Three years, three great books and thousands of readers, library discussions, bookstore purchases, student questions, author events and bus-stop conversations later, I am still excited each year to learn about the new book that all of San Francisco will be reading.

With *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story*, we all have a chance to learn more about a country that we hear about in the news all the time, but may not yet have a personal connection to. Tamim Ansary gives us that chance, to learn about the history and culture of Afghanistan, to consider the connections between San Francisco and the Middle East and to learn one man’s story of defining a life where his Afghan and American identities meet.

A message from City Librarian Luis Herrera

At the San Francisco Public Library, we see thousands of books arriving and circulating every year; but there is something very special and exciting about watching the big stacks of One City One Book books go on display and find their way into San Francisco readers’ hands.

Everyone who checks out *West of Kabul, East of New York*—or buys a copy at their local bookstore, borrows it from a friend or checks it out of their school library—is taking part in this wonderful reading experiment. Cities and towns across the United States, in Canada and other international locations are joined together in our attempt to bring readers together. We all read alone, but we can and do experience books together through discussions in community spaces, by exploring shared themes on screen and by joining the author in neighborhood venues throughout the city. Read on!



WEST OF KABUL EAST OF NEW YORK

About the Book

Born to an Afghan father and an American mother, Tamim Ansary grew up in the intimate world of Afghan family life and emigrated to San Francisco thinking he'd left Afghan culture behind forever. But at the height of the Iranian Revolution he took a harrowing journey through the Islamic world and in the years that followed, he struggled to unite his divided self and to find a place in his imagination where his Afghan and American identities might meet.

In *West of Kabul, East of New York*, we travel at Ansary's side, and he gives us rare access to Afghan culture—from the time of "old Afghanistan," through Soviet rule and later, the Taliban.

After 9/11, Afghanistan once again found itself upon the world's stage, and in direct conflict with the United States—and yet, the country was as obscure to the West as ever. Tamim Ansary, who has lived embedded in both American and Afghan society, is uniquely capable of reaching across both cultures, and through his experiences he begins to inspire the empathy necessary to transcend differences. His stirring memoir offers much to discuss.

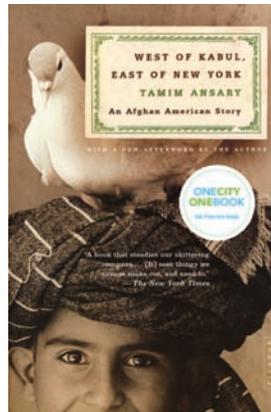
West of Kabul, East of New York is available at the Library in paperback and audio format.

"The memoir is an idyllic remembrance of his childhood in Afghanistan, the search for Islam in a journey he took in 1980 through the Muslim world, and an ongoing examination of his identity as an Afghan and American."

San Jose Mercury News

"Lucid, often surprisingly funny: a very welcome contribution to our understanding of this tragic nation."

Kirkus Reviews
(starred review)



About the Author

Tamim Ansary, author of *West of Kabul, East of New York: An Afghan American Story*, the 2008 selection for One City One Book: San Francisco Reads, writes and lectures about Afghanistan, Islamic history, democracy, schooling and learning, fiction and the writing process, and other issues as they grab his imagination. He also directs the San Francisco

Writers Workshop, the oldest continuous free writers' workshop in America and the hub of a growing community of Bay Area writers. He lives in San Francisco and is currently at work on his next book. Visit his website for more information: <http://www.mirtamimansary.com/>

"Part memoir, part exploration of militant Islam, with a smattering of contemporary Afghan history. The two strands intertwine in poignant passages. His voice [is] both humble and piercing. He writes movingly of a lost world built around family and faith."

The Washington Post Book World



Author's wife Debby and Tamim, c1980

ONE CITY ONE BOOK

September

Saturday, Sept. 6
One City One Book
Launch Day

Thursday, Sept. 11
7:30 p.m.
Author reading
Booksmith
1644 Haight St.
(415) 863-8688

Saturday, Sept. 20
2 p.m.
Author reading
Western Addition
Branch Library
1550 Scott St.
(415) 355-5727

Sunday, Sept. 21
2 p.m.
Author reading
Book Passage
1 Ferry Building
(415) 835-1020

Wednesday, Sept. 24
7 p.m.
Arts & Culture Salon
Featuring Tamim Ansary
Excelsior Branch Library
4400 Mission St.
(415) 355-2868
Book sales by Red Hill Books

Thursday, Sept. 25
6:30 p.m.
Book discussion
Marina Branch Library
1890 Chestnut St.
(415) 355-2823

Thursday, Sept. 25
6:30 p.m.
Book discussion
Books Inc.
Laurel Village Store
3515 California St.
(415) 221-3666

Saturday, Sept. 27
2 p.m.
Book discussion
Merced Branch Library
155 Winston Drive
(415) 355-2825

October

Thursday, Oct. 2
6:30 p.m.
Instant Book Club
with Tamim Ansary
Books Inc., Opera Plaza
601 Van Ness Ave.
(415) 776-1111
Moderator/librarian
Lauren John will lead a lively
discussion about literature
and life—with the author at
our side!

Monday, Oct. 6
6 p.m.
Litquake presents
East of Istanbul:
Voices from the Muslim World
Mechanics' Institute
57 Post St.
(415) 393-0101
Featuring authors Tamim Ansary,
Anita Amirrezvani, Persis Karim and
Niloufar Talebi. Moderated by Sandip Roy

Thursday, Oct. 16
6:30 p.m.
Book discussion
Books Inc.
Marina Store
2251 Chestnut St.
(415) 931-3633



Class photo, 1958, in Lashkar Gah



The Ansary family at Kayakai Dam

Unless specifically noted, the author will not be present at events/book discussions.

Wednesday, Oct. 15
6:30 p.m.
Rebuilding Afghanistan:
Literary, Artistic and Cultural
Endeavors
Main Library
Koret Auditorium
100 Larkin St.
(415) 557-4277
Tamim Ansary will moderate this
panel discussion with special
guests Mo Qayoumi, president
of California State University
East Bay; UC Berkeley professor
Wali Ahmadi; photographer
Joseph N. Hoyt; and Humaira
Ghilzai, president of Afghan
Friends Network.

ONE CITY ONE BOOK



Tamim Ansary, c. 1970s

Wednesday, Oct. 22

6:30 p.m.

Tamim Ansary in Conversation
with Oscar Villalon

Main Library, Koret Auditorium
100 Larkin St.

(415) 557-4277

Join us for this a special discussion about the writing life
with our One City One Book author and the *San Francisco
Chronicle* Book Editor.
Book sales and signing after the event.

Sunday, Oct. 19

2–4:30 p.m.

Knitting for Afghanistan: Show and Tell and Learn
Presented by afghans for Afghans

Main Library
Latino/Hispanic Community Meeting Room
100 Larkin St.
(415) 557-4400

Learn how and why Bay Area residents and students are
volunteering to knit for the people of Afghanistan. Enjoy
slides from Afghanistan, show and tell about your own
knitted blankets and garments bound for Afghanistan, see
examples of authentic Afghan knitting styles and hang out
and knit with us. Bring your excess wool yarn to swap with
others! For more information visit afghansforAfghans.org.

Unless specifically noted, the
author will not be present at
events/book discussions.



Tamim's father and his brothers, 1962

Thursday, Oct. 23

6:30 p.m.

Book discussion

Books Inc.
Market Street Store
2275 Market St.
(415) 864-6777

Saturday, Oct. 25

2 p.m.

Noe Valley/Sally Brunn
Branch Library
and Cover to Cover
Bookstore present
"Tea and Talk
with Tamim"

451 Jersey St.
(415) 355-5707

One City Four Films Journey to Afghanistan

Thursdays at Noon

Main Library, Koret Auditorium

Oct. 9 *Osama* (2003, 83 min.)

Oct. 16 *Charlie Wilson's War*
(2007, 102 min)

Oct. 23 *The Kite Runner*
(2007, 128 min.)

Oct. 30 *The Beauty Academy
of Kabul* (2006, 74 min.)

Related Exhibitions

Oct. 11, 2008

–Jan. 18, 2009

Afghanistan 1970-1975
Images from an Era of
Peace

Main Library, Sixth Floor
Skylight Gallery
100 Larkin St., S.F.
(415) 557-4400

Black and white photographs
of a peaceful time in this
culturally and historically rich
nation depict Afghans of all
ages, stunning landscapes,
ancient ruins and thriving
textile markets.

For more information visit
sfpl.org or call (415) 557-4277.



©1973 by Joseph N. Hoyt, 19 Boys

Oct. 24, 2008 –Jan. 25, 2009

Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National
Museum, Kabul

Asian Art Museum
100 Larkin St., S.F., (415) 557-4400,
<http://www.asianart.org/afghanistan.htm>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

One City One Book Discussion Questions

1. Tamim Ansary says in the opening line of the prologue that “for many long years, my siblings and I thought we were the only Afghans in America.” How did your understanding of his cross-cultural experience expand and change throughout his memoir? What differences and similarities between Western and Afghan culture surprised you most?
2. How did you react to Ansary’s e-mail arguing against “bombing Afghanistan back to the Stone Age”? His e-mail drew out a scenario of what would happen within the Muslim world should America and Britain strike against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. How has this scenario unfolded in the past years?
3. Discuss how Ansary uses mood, voice and detail to evoke the landscape of his childhood. Did you visualize the walled villages and the city compounds where each loose network of extended families lived? How does Ansary bring this lost world to the page, and the sense of what it was like to live there?
4. To some extent, Debby maintains an important place in Ansary’s story not just because she is Ansary’s wife, but also because she embodies the theme of courtship within a tight circle (even family). How does Ansary use his early relationship with Debby as a way to illustrate the Afghan cultural preference for marriage between first cousins?
5. What role does Debby play when Ansary confronts his brother Riaz about his Islamic fundamentalism? How does her status as a Jew play into Ansary’s argument with his brother?
6. The heart of this memoir lies in Ansary’s conflict between his American self and his Muslim self. How does this tension manifest itself during his early years in Kabul and in American Lashkargah, and later during his attempted journey back to Afghanistan as a macho journalist in pursuit of a good Middle-Eastern conflict story?

7. What story was Ansary pursuing when he attempted to return to Afghanistan? Did you share his realizations, or were they clear to you from the start?
8. How did you feel when his search ended a few days later in Istanbul, when he met Albert, the Puerto Rican student of Sheikh Zamzama? What was it about their conversation that caused him to ultimately abandon his search for Islam?
9. The topic of communal living appears several times in this story because it is a core value of traditional Afghan life. It is even reflected in the physical construction of villages and compounds in Afghanistan. Ansary takes up a variation of this kind of living in Portland, during the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s and 70’s. What were the similarities and differences between the two cultures, in terms of how the space was shared and the intimacy of those who shared it?
10. What was your impression of Ansary’s relationship with his siblings and parents during the early years? How did his relationship with each member change when they moved to America? How did they adapt to American culture and influence one another, especially in terms of their religious and secular lives?
11. Discuss how Ansary integrates the history of Afghanistan and world events into his personal narrative. Is it possible to see the influence of history upon a single person, or to view an individual as an agent of history?
12. When Ansary returns to Afghanistan after his father’s death, while residing in the last remaining Ansary compound with his cousin, what does he discover about Afghan culture that transcends the ideological conflicts that had run through his adult life? What is it about generosity that gives life true meaning?

Questions courtesy of Picador USA: www.picadorusa.com

Join a *West of Kabul, East of New York* book discussion
at LitMinds (litminds.org)

MORE ABOUT AFGHANISTAN

About Afghanistan

Lying along important trade routes connecting southern and eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East, Afghanistan has long been a prize sought by empire builders, and for millennia great armies have attempted to subdue it, leaving traces of their efforts in great monuments now fallen to ruin. The country's forbidding landscape of deserts and mountains has laid many imperial ambitions to rest, as has the tireless resistance of its fiercely independent peoples—so independent that the country has failed to coalesce into a nation but has instead long endured as a patchwork of contending ethnic factions and ever-shifting alliances.

The modern boundaries of Afghanistan were established in the late 19th century in the context of a rivalry between imperial Britain and tsarist Russia that Rudyard Kipling termed the "Great Game." Modern Afghanistan became a pawn in struggles over political ideology and commercial influence. In the last quarter of the 20th century, Afghanistan suffered the ruinous effects of civil war greatly exacerbated by a military invasion and occupation by the Soviet Union (1979–89).

In subsequent armed struggles, a surviving Afghan communist regime held out against Islamic insurgents (1989–92), and, following a brief rule by mujahideen groups, an austere movement of religious students—the Taliban—rose up against the country's governing parties and warlords and established a theocratic regime (1996–2001) that soon fell under the influence of a group of well-funded Islamists led by an exiled Saudi Arabian, Osama bin Laden.

The Taliban regime collapsed in December 2001 in the wake of a sustained U.S.-dominated military campaign aimed at the Taliban and fighters of bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization. Soon thereafter, anti-Taliban forces agreed to a period of transitional leadership and an administration that would lead to a new constitution and the establishment of a democratically elected government.



Tamim's sister with his grandmother and a friend

A serene city of mosques and gardens during the storied reign of the emperor Babur (1526–30), Kabul, Afghanistan's capital, lay in ruins following the long and violent Afghan War. So, too, fared much of the country, its economy in shambles and its people scattered and despondent. By the early 21st century an entire generation of Afghans had come to adulthood knowing nothing but war.

Adapted from
*Encyclopædia
Britannica 2008*

Learn More about Local Organizations Working in Afghanistan

afghans for Afghans

<http://www.afghansforafghans.org>

afghans for Afghans is a humanitarian and educational people-to-people project that sends hand-knit and crocheted blankets and sweaters, vests, hats, mittens, and socks to the beleaguered people of Afghanistan. This grassroots effort is inspired by Red Cross volunteers who made afghans, socks, slippers, and other items for soldiers and refugees during World Wars I and II and other times of crisis and need.

Afghan Friends Network

<http://www.afghanfriends.net/>

Afghan Friends Network (AFN) is a nonprofit organization for enabling friendships, networks, and partnerships between individuals, organizations and cities in the United States and Afghanistan. We believe the experience of cultural, spiritual, and technical exchange enriches the lives of all participants.

Afghans4Tomorrow

<http://www.afghans4tomorrow.com/>

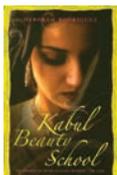
A non-profit 501(C)(3), non-political, humanitarian organization dedicated to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. A4T is an all volunteer effort with members across the United States and in Afghanistan. We focus on Education, Agriculture and Health projects. Working with the local communities, other organizations, and our dedicated volunteers has made a difference in the lives of many Afghans. We will continue with our schools, health clinic and greening projects into the future.

MORE BOOKS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If you liked *West of Kabul, East of New York*, check out these books:

Come Back to Afghanistan: A California Teenager's Story
by Said Hyder Akbar and Susan Burton



Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes

Behind the Veil
by Deborah Rodriguez with Kristin Ohlson

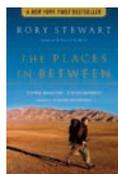
Kabul in Winter: Life Without Peace in Afghanistan
by Ann Jones



The Kite Runner
by Khaled Hosseini

Lessons from Afghanistan
by David Fleishhacker

Love and War in Afghanistan
by Alex Klaitis and Gulchin Gulmamadova-Klaitis



The Places in Between
By Rory Stewart

The Silenced Cry: One Woman's Diary of a Journey to Afghanistan
by Ana Tortajada, translated by Ezra E. Fitz

Snapshots: This Afghan American Life
edited by Tamim Ansary and Yalda Asmatey



The Story of My Life: An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky
By Farah Ahmedi with Tamim Ansary

The Swallows of Kabul
by Yasmina Khadra



...One School at a Time
by Greg Mortenson

A Thousand Splendid Suns
by Khaled Hosseini

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace

Looking for more book recommendations? Take a look at NextReads, a new service from San Francisco Public Library, where you can find all sorts of suggestions in different subjects. More info at sfpl.org.

All books are available at the San Francisco Public Library.

Connect with One City One Book online:

Visit One City One Book on MySpace:
<http://www.myspace.com/onecityonebooksf>

Find One City One Book on Facebook!

"One City One Book is the kind of program that can thrive in San Francisco. We're an unquestionably literary-minded and literary-appreciative community here...we're open to hearing the stories and voices maybe other parts of the country would be reluctant to listen to."

Oscar Villalon, *San Francisco Chronicle* Book Editor

One City One Book Co-Chairs

Jean Freeman and Sari Swig

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Oscar Villalon, Book Editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Photos courtesy of Tamim Ansary

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