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Muslim cab drivers rescue New York City's oldest Jewish bagel bakery from closing, plan to keep it kosher

'I'm happy I can take care of this store, turn a profit, make customers happy'

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Todd Maisel/New York Daily News

Brooklyn Hot Bialys & Bagels was about to close, but was saved by Peerzada Shah and his partner Zafaryab Ali.

The oldest Jewish bialy and bagel shop in New York City is being rescued by two Muslim cab drivers — and they plan to keep it kosher.

Coney Island Bialys and Bagels — founded in 1920 by Morris Rosenzweig, a Jewish immigrant of Bialystok, Poland — was about to go out of business until two unlikely proprietors saved it.

Zafaryab Ali and Peerzada Shah said the first bagels and bialys they ever tasted when they immigrated here from Pakistan more than 16 years ago were made at the Gravesend noshery.

“I felt I had to save this store,” said Ali, 54, who worked for Rozenzweig’s grandson Steve Ross for 11 years, making bagels and bialys by hand, committing to memory the recipes Rosenzweig brought over from the old country.

Ali, a married father of two young girls, said he quit five years ago to earn a bigger paycheck as a cabbie.

“I’m happy I can take care of this store, turn a profit and make customers happy,” Ali said.

Ali and Shah said geopolitics that divide Muslims and Jews have no bearing on making 95-cent bagels and their flatter, oniony cousins, the bialys.

“It doesn’t matter,” Ali said of the cross-cultural differences. “I make the food for everyone.”

“I don’t even think about it,” added Shah, 47. “I just look at this as a business opportunity.”

Ross said he couldn’t think of two better guys to pass on the Coney Island Ave. family business to.

“I’d like to see them flourish because they’re making a product that my grandfather brought to this country,” Ross said.

Shah and Ali met and became roommates after immigrating to New York. Back in Pakistan, Shah made his livelihood repairing baking equipment, and he enrolled in culinary school when he first came here.

They were both driving cabs when Ali went to fuel up at his favorite gas station and the attendant told him that the bagel shop was about to close. He called Ross right away and worked out a deal for him and Shah to take it over.

The partners said they plan to keep using all the old kosher-certified equipment but have spiffed up the place, replacing floors and walls.

“I hope they build the business up and do more business than I did,” said Ross, who has been advising the pair.

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz dropped by yesterday to wish the new proprietors *mazel tov* and *salaam aleikum* !” Markowitz vowed to return for a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Ross’ loyal customers said they were relieved to hear their beloved bialy and bagel shop was still cooking.

“I almost cried when I found out they were closing,” said customer Ellen Steiner, 57, of Midwood. “This is the best bialy place in Brooklyn.”

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