

The first time we introduced you to Ibrahim Parlak was in 2005, shortly after Chicago writer Alex Kotlowitz detailed Parlak's troubling legal battles in The New York Times magazine.

In short: Parlak has been in the United States since 1991, when he emigrated from his native Turkey and was granted political asylum. Since 1994, he has owned the popular Middle Eastern restaurant Cafe Gulistan in Harbert, a town in the resort strip that hugs the lake in southwestern Michigan.

In 2004, Department of Homeland Security agents arrested Parlak on charges that he committed crimes when he was involved with a Kurdish separatist group in Turkey. He has maintained that not to be true, and that as a young man he became involved in human rights efforts in his homeland and was tortured and imprisoned there as a result.

The U.S. government declared him a terrorist and wanted him deported. He was jailed for 10 months in Calhoun County jail in Battle Creek, Mich., and released in June 2005.

The reason that his story has not vanished, that he has not vanished, is that Parlak has a great many friends. They remain passionate, energetic and effective in lobbying reporters and lawmakers, and raising funds for his growing pile of legal bills.

Sidewalks rarely gets into political matters, but Osgood, who has a house near Harbert, recently sat down with his pal Parlak and got up to speed on the big events in his life.

The most recent took place on a late June afternoon when Michigan state Sen. Ron Jelinek introduced a resolution before the state Senate in Lansing to grant "permanent lawful resident status" to Parlak.

A number of people spoke on Parlak's behalf, and this is some of what they said:

Dan Coffey, real estate agent: "His acts of kindness are legion, and the stories of what he has done for members of our community, whether prominent or not, would take hours to tell."

Willis Noel Brown, retired Presbyterian minister: "When he first came to Harbert, he lived in a house on my property. ... We have come to know him well — to admire his personal strength under great pressure, his good business sense and his willingness to contribute to the life of our community. He is no longer a stranger; he is one of us."

Parlak spoke, saying, in part: "My hope is today to have my American way of life back. ... My hope is to live in a country I love. ... America is my only country. America is my only home. America is where I belong. America is not a hotel for me."

The final speaker was his daughter, Livia Gazzolo. At one of his court appearances in 2004, the then-7-year-old stood outside the courtroom wearing a T-shirt that read, "Free My Dad."

In June, she said this: "Now, I understand dreams don't always come true, but I trust that one day my daddy will be able to wake up in the morning in this country with a smile on his face, his passport in his drawer and freedom in the air."

You can keep an eye on this case at **freeibrahim.com**.

You can visit Cafe Gulistan at 13581 Red Arrow Highway. Try the chicken.

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