

Transcript for Dr. Jamil Akbik

July 15, 2014

Hanna: My name is Hanna _____ and today is Tuesday July 15 at 11:15am on behalf of Crossroad to Freedom, Aspire 2014, Rhodes College and all of the partners thank you for making time to be here for this interview

Dr. Jamil Akbik: You're welcome

Hanna: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself

Dr. Jamil Akbik: My name is _____ Jamil Akbik I'm a vascular surgeon. I been in Memphis since 1978 where I did my training in vascular surgery before that I spent six years in Boston Massachusetts were I was trained in _____ surgery I graduated from the Masters University of Medical School. And came to this state in 1973 so that quite a long time. I been practicing in Memphis since I finish my fellowship in 1980 and basically I was

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a solo _____ until last year were I join St. Francis and became part of their institution I married I have seven children between me and my wife and five grandchildren

Hanna: When did you coming in Memphis and why

Dr. Jamil Akbik: As I said I came in 1978 I did fellowship and vascular surgery the process is you do training and general surgery and if you want to move one state higher than you have certain training that you need to do and I wanted to be a vascular surgeon so that's when I came to Memphis after I had finish my training just I guess destiny is that I stayed here and fortunately showed itself and little by little I started having more children and my practice grow and you just get used to the place

Hanna: What was Memphis like

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when you got here

Dr. Jamil Akbik: My very small town it is a basically a large farming town you might call it give you an idea Germantown Rd. was only two lanes one right and one left there was absolutely nothing on Germantown Rd. from the highway all the way down to Popular Ave. Germantown itself was probable the half of size it is now when you drive on Popular basically from Kirby until you get to Highland not much there inset farmland than trees of course it is totally the front where I did my fellowship at Baptist I don't know if you remember Baptist Hospital in downtown it was the largest private

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hospital in the world it had two thousand bed and that was the center of medical care between Baptist Methodist and St. Jude it grew tremendously since than in terms of population in terms of building and activities and industries and thrown

Hanna: Did you have difficulty fitting in to the new society

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Not much first being a vascular surgeon it was very easy for me to blend with the professional activities or organization and so on one of the blessings of Memphis since early in the game there was significant presence for both Syrian population and Muslim population so

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it was very easy to communicate with them and have a very rich social life as far as blending with the rest of the society it also _____ Memphis is a suburban city and its people very much coming to strangers

Hanna: Was there a large Syrian population

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Relatively speaking of course it multiplied significantly but in those days there wasn't a large population of any Islamic or Middle Eastern communities but when you take it to a relatively term I would say there was enough that was easy to create a social activity center around the ethnic background probably I would say somewhere between ten to fifteen families which cause a significant number

Hanna: Was there a Muslim community in Memphis

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at the time

Dr. Jamil Akbik: There was a very small community that for an example the we had only one room where the _____ Islam used is now that was where we used to pray it was an old house probably less than a thousand feet in size and it was we had the main living area that was used as a prayer place of course many of the older brothers were there they stick with us some of them _____ brother Dr. _____ may God bless his soul was very much the founding father of the community link quickly with brother _____ brother Khandekar and many others when we had for an example _____ prayer probably had no more

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them five four six people from the _____ we have now we used to have eight prayer take a room from UT and that where we had our eight prayer there was a community it was small and it started growing we had the foundation with the input of those brothers and the activities and the dedication and little by little family grew something more people came to the city and of course you see what we had now from there were only two mosque our mosque and _____ of course Masjid the oldest mosque in Memphis and now I think we have up to six maybe about so it change significantly

Hanna: Do you remember when Masjid Islam was built

Dr. Jamil Akbik: The existing one was built somewhere around seventy-nine

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to eighty and it was a tremendous achievement we think we had the land I think we had probably no more than twenty or thirty families at that time with all of our blessing we were able to raise the funds

and start the process and many people contributed their time and their knowledge so I would say a lot of people finish around 1980

Hanna: What else do you remember about Masjid Salam beside the _____ prayer

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Even before the mosque was built there was again many activities _____ there was very active teaching program we used to have _____ every Sunday either before or after the _____ prayer it will be amaze to know that _____ was open

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for both brothers and sisters and we took turn and reading _____ and trying to _____ and explain it being an Arabic speaking my tongue I was helping quite a being quite a bit in the translations but it was common for sisters to prepare and give presentation that would probable is different from what it is know sister _____ brother _____ wife part of this sister _____ wife also was part of it brother _____ and his wife were very active early in the game there were uncalled that was one thing we started a Sunday school where we have the back room and the kitchen and that old building or old house

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and I started with brother _____ who is now in (speaking Arabic) started Sunday school and that grew as the growth continue we had more children coming in and this is before present few of course as you see things are more professional and _____ escape Friday prayer was part of that process with (speaking Arabic) we took turn on the _____ because we didn't have any mom we took turn on who will come to open the door for _____ prayer and who took clothes for after _____ prayer we took turn in cleaning the Masjid it wasn't unusually to walk into the bathroom area and see brother _____ or - _____ on their knees cleaning that bathroom our children as they grew they take a weekend off and

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they would clean the entire mosque we didn't have enough funds to hire people to do this I was remember of the _____ from the very beginning and probable six or seven years ago and I remember the early budget was in the area of thirty thousand dollars this is are annual budget and so we didn't have much money to spend on many things that's kinda of a snapshot of the history of that time

Hanna: Now let's talk about a little bit of 9/11 and Muslims in Memphis at the time what was your reaction to the 9/11 attack

Dr. Jamil Akbik: It was an extremely diverse stating event in my case on multi-level number one I knew what as a Muslim that this is going to be very negative impact on us the community on the other hand my son _____ the oldest

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was in New York at that time he was New York University and basically it was like two blocks from the building of 9/11 fur than the tower Twin Tower so when the event happen there were a great _____ anxiety about him took some time until the afternoon until he called and he said that he is ok he basically had to walk I don't know if he know New York is a very large town and he had to walk something like a fifty block to get where he can take the subway and go back to his apartment but we

were again the community was small and it was easier to make decision than so we were aware that there will be a negative backlash now what this said I think we had we were bless in Memphis that this

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negative backlash wasn't that bad as a matter of fact we really see the lot of support from our neighbors all of our friends patients as a position it wasn't unusually for them to call for an example the mosque say if the sisters needed to go to have grocery and they were nervous because many of the sisters had a job than they will be happy to accompanied them to do that I received many calls from my patients again asking if I you know anybody brothering me so there will we didn't have any of them there was no vandalizing of the property but again with this set we expected that it will be some negative reaction so we will proactive and we immediately put a program where we open the door of the mosque and we have multiplied events were we invite our neighbors

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and other churches members and come we used those _____ number one to serve food food is always a good way to get to somebody and to ready show what we are about that we are members of the community meaning Memphis community that the theme was that we are here to stay we are raising families we have the same concern that they do about worried about children about their education worried about our lively hood and our safety and that we _____ opposed the ideology that lead to 9/11 that was one part of the program the other part was we establish regular visited through churches through school through other communities in Memphis institution where you have large number of people it wasn't unusually

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for me to spend every Sunday for like two or three months going to one church to the other and the churches the people were very _____ so I can tell you that every major church in Memphis was visited by me and basically it was to explain and tell what our understanding of Islam is and that was a receive the positive way the only major church that really didn't have a chance to go to was Bellevue Baptist Church and they still kind of offer a little bit holding back so those two thing we communicated with the F.B.I right away we told them we are about and that we are _____ to act of violence and that we will be policing our congregation and if we see anything that might look unusually we will let them know and they will receptive to this and we have multiple visits

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especially brother _____ had a closet contact with the F.B.I so all of this factors lessen the blue so there wasn't really much of negative lash from overreaction but _____ everything that is bad something good comes out of it and as a result of this our dower program our education activity our social activities multiplied and increase our teach to others communities also increase and it serve and a way purpose of creating _____ of mess and only community and unified the view to have to react and something like this to happen

Hanna: Can you named some of the churches you guys work with

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Long time life for an example the Catholic Church

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on Kimbrough and Poplar Avenue I forgot its name that will be one there's a major church on Union and East Parkway again one of the major church in Memphis St. Luke is another one there is another major church well Bellevue used to be so again the St. Francis church I think on Germantown road. We were there many schools my school and elementary schools I had several appearances with other organization I spoke to the F.B.I particular had their field officers and I gave a lecture I gave a speech to Baptist Hospital and also had their staff to

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because they wanted them to be aware on how they treat Muslim patients that will be an example _____ I say this is almost what is it now twenty years ago no fifteen years ago

Hanna: Going back to your involvement _____ what exactly did you do this counsel

Dr. Jamil Akbik: I was a member of the _____ or at least twenty years I think at various time I was either a vice president or I was a responsible for education we had a different attitude and nobody wanted to be a president so we always had a great deal of argument on who should be president because nobody would take the job so we many times will play tricks whoever is not there will elect them a president so it cannot

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but finally they put enough pressure on me and I became president of this society for five years don't ask me about the dates because the memory not what it used to be so I was president of the society and we started growing then we will have more activities like I don't know probably to remember we will have _____ and variety of policies we had serval _____ at the Woodlawn hill country club we had celebrity to come and either entertain or give speeches as I said the community grew and then we had an official Sunday school that grew to become Pleasant View concept started at _____ or Muslim society of Memphis then grew

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both brothers kind of became independent and persuade that but all ways had a support of Pleasant View and that beginning I was _____ involve with Pleasant View activities especially during the time where they had a great _____ difficulties at one time the building wasn't finish and they could not come up with notes to pay them back the bank was about to foreclosure on the building and take it and I remember five brothers used their homes as _____ to prevent the bank from doing that and so now all that is history now you have Pleasant View we will elated to have up to the third grade now we used to have eleventh grade now _____ so that's part of the things that I was involve in not to mention the organization selecting a _____ and putting programs for youths for adults

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mainly education activities I was very active in the education in terms of teaching Arabic and explaining and translating Quran we had several classes that lasted about a year or so I taught basic Arabic I had serval classes about Quran and relationship with Quran and life and most of those be attendance by a significant number of brothers and sisters

Hanna: Were the youths involve in those activities

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Yes but not as much as it is now that's one of the things that very happy to see now the youth involvement is very impressive and very heartwarming there is part of that you have to remember that you have folks who came from overseas we had a lot of baggage in terms of our culture making so

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wish is by the way it is not the Islamic way my always preach the need to have the younger generation involve in this and I use to use examples of _____ Quran for an example _____ you can't have about four or number seven and people fit here I mean in Arabic young under the age of fifteen or sixteen and it shows their struggles so being a young age doesn't exclude you from being active in the issue of faith many of the scholars that will live after the prophet for a long time to teach about Islam where extremely long teenagers or younger (speaking Arabic) for an example (speaking Arabic) are very young people there were in (speaking Arabic) they were young one the prophet and they took from the prophet _____ so I did push for that there were some resistances but as the younger

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generation grew and became more aggressive and demanding to be part of it we see now things are change of course part of what I failed is that you will combine the strength of faith with the positive _____ of the Americans of the culture which is the personal courage to speak up and pursue what needs to be done we live in a very impressive political system in society so it was hard for us to have the same courage that you do know and we very happy to see that

Hanna: Can you describe more of the program at _____ and at Pleasant View

Dr. Jamil Akbik: _____ As I said we had the basic program was the Sunday (speaking Arabic) which was most of the time it depends if it is summer or winter either

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before or after the _____ prayer and the way it will be done we will start with the beginning of the Quran and you will have names of people who will be willing to go and prepare and make presentations and it will rotate and we finish the last time I was there and I know that we finish the Quran twice so that take roughly about seven to eight years and so fifteen twenty years _____ that was there were a debate should only one person who have more knowledge make the presentation or should we continue to have whatever who want to volunteer and the valley of volunteer was the person who make the presentation will have to practice will have to read they will have to brush on their Arabic the disadvantages of that is that they might not be as good as making the presentation so people

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who are listening might lose interest but that was the cornerstone and then after that added program after _____ prayer on weekends were they will have a _____ presentation that took shape more when we had a resident _____ who will be able to do those things and live close by as far as the school the early school before Pleasant because Pleasant View was then ran by mostly professionals people they hire teachers and so on the school (speaking Arabic) we had program were the divided between teaching Arabic especially Quran Arabic we had program to teach Islamic _____ and teach _____ so like in the early days we had three classes older

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generation of kids now like the children of brother _____ and Khandekar was one of the students _____ my son it was a Sunday activity two or three hours but it was up for value because it keep close children together they will spend some time playing and socializing and also it put in their minds the very basic of Islamic faith once Pleasant View was built then they had regular classes and they had teacher and curriculum

Hanna: Now talking about the present Muslim community of Memphis were of some changes you seen since you arrived

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Several number one the most striking is the size of the community of course

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and the number of _____ that are in town so that's number one I think there is more of young blood that is involve in the running of the affair which is a good thing there is more of a professionalizing and managing the difference society or different institution and I mean about that as I said for an example give you a kind offer contrast when we built the _____ it was mostly built by volunteers and we had professionals people but the architect and diagram was made by member of the community when we had a leak in the roof most of the time we will have somebody from the community who knows a little bit about fixing

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a leak and they would go and fix it now if you wanted to take pictures we didn't have videos then if wanted to take pictures then one of us will be bring their cameras and they will shoot pictures and they put them on the board in the Mosque now if you wanted to take a video you are kind of professional I mean that what you do that your education when they built M.I.C they contacted a repeatable contraction who did the things that it supposed to be done so there is more of professionalizing the education activity of course are far more than we used to have the reason because now we have professional people we have people like _____ that is his job that's his education he is a person who is trained to do what he is doing we have

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the escape my name the young man who is leading the _____ prayer reciting the Quran at M.I.C that what he is he is a half _____ and he is train to do that it is not that he is a position and on the side he is doing that people who do the maintenance people who do the audio video control and all of those people are trained and what they are doing and so that made it more _____ and bring the message and containing Pleasant View school as you see it now we shifted again from mostly volunteers even the _____ or the _____ mostly ran by volunteers now you have a professional super attendant and who is train to do that most of the teachers

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have education and degrees and that's what they are trained to do and that is an actually way on how the community will grow and it just evolved things don't stay the same and that's nice to see

Hanna: What advice will you give to young Muslim leaders in Memphis community

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Be active from an Islamic point of view and from a social point of view. Part of the presence as a Muslim is to be involved in a variety of ways that actually you can count that there is three

levels of involvement as a human being the first one is your involvement with your creators or your worship you show the facts you believe in one god the second is your involvement with yourself taking care of yourself being sure

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that your healthy that you are not doing bad habits you get your education and so on the third is your community and the community should not be by my advice you should not be restricted to do the Muslims community you still you living in a large community and there is a responsibility there is a street in your neighborhood that need to be fixing get in involve and talk to your presentative talk to your counsel man whoever it is and by being active number one this is a act of worship because (speaking Arabic) has he created us he made us responsible of this university that he created he said that he will make a (speaking Arabic) somebody who is a sign to take care of things and he assigned humans to take care and especially Muslims and so part of our worshipping our god is that we will take care of this _____ this trust

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he put so be active and don't be afraid don't be you are living in a society where the one who want something will have to go and go it nothing will come to you if you are sitting you will not be a scholar you will not get your tuition paid by a grant if you don't excel and make good grades so that mean work that mean work is part of being a good Muslim being receptive to the criticize if there is something that can be better and most of all be self-critical always _____ what you are doing and try to make it better and be thankful that it is lot easier on you than it was on us and _____ will be even easier on the next generation but it will never be completely easy

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life party of the life is to continue to struggle and improved things constantly

Hanna: If a young Muslim was to come in a _____ and ask you how you will get involve how would you direct them

Dr. Jamil Akbik: Number one is found out what is there in terms of organization or _____ of groups I mean they have groups responsible for certain things if there is a group that will fit what you are interested in then joined that group that one to do it the other way is try to see where there is a need for something to be done there might be a need to make the landscape around the mosque so volunteer to do that and volunteering is not a temporary thing that will be a task

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that you will do on a regular basics maybe there is a chance to have a class full of younger children to can of to play with them and teach them sports and things like that the point is don't wait for me to tell you what to do you go study what is there found out what things can be made better and use your talent and your knowledge to make things better

Hanna: What do you think the future of Muslim community of Memphis be like

Dr. Jamil Akbik: _____ I mean it's going to be better and it's going to grow I think what we see now _____ is a as you younger generation grow up you will combine the beauty and the strength of the Islamic faith with the beauty and the strength of the American culture

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when American culture has many short coming of course like many other cultures it has a lot of strengths and as matter of fact most of the strength in the American culture is driven from Islam the foundation of American if you will respect of a human being when you look at all the laws and _____ and the _____ structure of the country and so on it is all based that the human being should be respected well believe it or not that the foundation of Islam said that he gave honor to the son of Adam and so it is easy to mix those two and used the American culture to show how beautiful Islam is and the best way to show how beautiful Islam is for you to live it and the preaching is good but what you do will have a lot more

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influence on the people on what you preach give you an example at one time I was the chief of staff at St. Joseph hospital and they used to have a quarterly meeting and this quarterly meeting they always served alcohol and they noticed I don't drink when I was chief of staff alcohol was discontinued being served in those meetings and then it became a tradition from there on they never served alcohol to their position of course some positions got accept but then that was few so what I'm saying I'm not saying I'm the best but by just doing and I didn't do it to impress anybody it just I don't drink and same thing like they will delay their meetings _____ so it will the fit the _____ time because they knew what _____ is at 5:30 the meeting is at five they will delay

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until 5:30 things like that so if we continue to show to understand Islam truly not only as a _____ but also as an active here as a _____ character _____ as to go number one is that it is has an value in itself because you are worshipping (speaking Arabic) wither you are praying or fasting but the adding as an important to the value that it will make it little personally out of you _____ number one _____ it says if you just fast what you behave badly there you fasting doesn't have any value so if we continue in this line I think we will number one we will have a better existence as Muslims number two we will served or duty to or surrounding that they will listen to us and they will improve on the things that are not good in this society

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they will be more to fighting drugs more towards fighting inequality and fighting hunger like they on Sunday what we sew on menus so the people similar the message between Judaism and Christianity and Islam basically they used the same _____ the same quote the same foundation for they talk and that is what we wanted to see show and finally if we continue to distance our self from the violent activity that do not represent what we believe with all of this I think _____ the future is bright I can see a time where you will have more than one Islamic school I can see a time where you will have a Islamic college either independent or part of an existing college where Muslims will be more involve

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financial and commercially and they surrounding (speaking Arabic) how many Muslims people are very successful in their business and again we will leave a good taste and _____ that this is a beautiful faith and we will share everybody we see how beautiful it is

Hanna: Is there anything else you like to tell us

Dr. Jamil Akbik: I think talk more than I should alright that's it

Hanna: Thank you for being here we really appreciated it