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Sharif Rashad: So welcome. My name is Sharif Rashad. Today is July 10th, and I believe it's around 12:00, and I'm currently with Crossroads to Freedom Aspire Program 2014, as well as Rhodes College, and many other partners. I would just like to say thank you on behalf of our program for spending time through your busy day.

Dr. Moin: I'm glad to be here.

Sharif Rashad: So tell me about yourself.

Dr. Moin: Well my name is Mohammed Moin, and I have been living in Memphis for the last 40 years or so, and my profession I'm a physician. I retired about two or three years ago, but then un-retired after five or six months, because I couldn't take the retirement, and therefore I'm a part-time physician currently. My family –

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Dr. Moin: -- consists of my wife, and two children, and two grandchildren who I call the pearls. They're the pearls in my life, and what else would you like to know about me?

Sharif Rashad: Well I'm just wondering when did you arrive in America, and when did you decide to make the trip over here?

Dr. Moin: I came to the United States in 1969. First I came to New Jersey where I did my internship, and after spending a year in New Jersey, and then in 1970 I came to Memphis, and joined the University of Tennessee here in Memphis to do my medical residency. So I spent three years in training at the University of Tennessee, and then I joined the private practice of the Baptist Hospital in Nuclear Medicine. My specialty is nuclear medicine.

Sharif Rashad: Very nice.

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Sharif Rashad: Did you happen to come here with anyone else?

Dr. Moin: Well my family was with me. My wife and my daughter at that time was I think about 14 months or so.

- Sharif Rashad:* What did your parents as well as the rest of your family think about coming over here? Was it a big issue?
- Dr. Moin:* Well my father was deceased at that time. My mother was alive, and she was in Canada, and therefore she was not too far from me, and I could visit her quite often.
- Sharif Rashad:* Sounds lovely. What was the image of America you had at that time?
- Dr. Moin:* The image of America was anything that was very advanced or progressive used to be in American, and therefore at that time I kind of had a choice of leaving India for –
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- Dr. Moin:* -- either England, or the United States, and I decided in favor of United States.
- Sharif Rashad:* Good, good. Were there any immigration issues when you first arrived here?
- Dr. Moin:* Were there any what issues?
- Sharif Rashad:* Immigration issues.
- Dr. Moin:* I'm talking about here in 1969 when I came to New Jersey, and in those days no there was not too many immigration issues as there are now. It was really easy to get into the country what you passed what was known as the ECFMG examination, which just stands for educational counsel for foreign medical graduates, you could get a training job in the United States. So internship was more or less guaranteed or reserved for you. So I came to New Jersey, worked at the Summerset Hospital, and –
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- Dr. Moin:* -- did 12 months of rotating internship, and then I moved to Memphis to continue with the training in medical residency.
- Sharif Rashad:* Do you feel you were treated equally when you came here, or were there any issues?
- Dr. Moin:* This is a very sensitive question, and you are likely to get different kinds of responses. It depends upon the sensitivity of the individual also, but over all this question of either racial bias or

prejudice, or whatever you want to call it was not hampering any of my training objectives on this. Indeed, at least in a subtle way there was considerable amount of racial bias, I would say, and also please keep this in mind that we are talking about almost –

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Dr. Moin: -- about more than 40 years ago. It was 1969. Things were different than what they are now on this.

Sharif Rashad: Did you have any difficulty besides any issues how you were treated? Just like fitting into society itself?

Dr. Moin: Yes, I'll tell you I was in England also for two years just prior to coming to the United States, and I have a kind of good feel for comparing the racial bias on either side of that Atlantic Ocean. So in England, also there was certain racial bias, and to speak the truth there is a racial bias all over the world. It's a question of the degree or extent of the racial bias, and I would say that –

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Dr. Moin: -- probably the bias was more intense in U.K. or England compared with United States, at least at the time when I arrived here in USA.

Sharif Rashad: Interesting. Can this go to perhaps a different time period in your opinion, but how would you describe the history of Islam in Memphis at this time?

Dr. Moin: The history of Islam, I really do not know much about what happened almost 200 years ago. I haven't studied the subject in detail, but I have come across certain articles that Muslims were even present way back in the 10th or 11th century also in the United States even before it was even discovered.

Sharif Rashad: Really?

Dr. Moin: Yes, but I do not know the authenticity of such articles.

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Dr. Moin: People described that there was some Muslims in the state of Arizona. So probably you would not like me to go that far back in history. So let's come back to the last 100 or 200 years are more likely come to Memphis. As far as this city is concerned Muslims

were, I was told, were present even more than 50 years ago, but since I came here in 1969 I can give you a person experience about my exposure to Memphis Muslims. In 1969 when I arrived in Memphis, there were not a lot of Muslims. If I were to make a guess I would say that they might have been hardly 10 to 15 Muslims in the city of Memphis at that time.

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Dr. Moin: Now as you know, you can even estimate that they are in thousands, probably close to 10,000 Muslims in the city. So having just a few Muslims, and the first year I do recall that on the Eid occasion we could not even arrange for Eid prayers, and we tried during the last two or three days of Ramadan to get together for the Eid prayers, but we were unsuccessful. So we did not pray the first year, at least I did not pray the first year. During the second year, we decided to have the prayers in a church that was located near the intersection of Madison and Manassas, the street between mid-town and downtown, and there was a group of about 12 to 15 people that –

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Dr. Moin: -- we prayed together in that church, and soon after the prayers since it was a working day, and we had to go back to work, everybody just fizzled out of the church, and went back to work. So we did not even have the time to socialize, or even introduce to each other. So although we prayed together, but we really didn't know each other at all, and after that we decided that in order to have plan ceremonies for the Eid, let's get together at some place. So we met in time to get a hall at the student center at the University of Tennessee, and we were able to get a hall. Then in that hall we used to meet once a week –

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Dr. Moin: -- on Sundays in the afternoon. Then around the Zuhr prayer time we used to study the Qur'an, one section or one ruku of the Qur'an every Sunday, followed by the Tafsir, and then after the educational session we used to socialize, and then we used to go back home, and since the student center is located in downtown, and most of us used to live in East Memphis it was a long drive. On the way back I used to stop by for ice cream for the children. It used to be a good social/religious meeting.

Sharif Rashad: So earlier you were talking about how when you originally came here there were not many Muslims here.

Dr. Moin: No as I mentioned there might have been about 10 or 15 Muslims, and again I'm talking about around 1970, --

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Dr. Moin: -- or so, but after that there has been gradual increase in the number of Muslims, and since University of Tennessee is here so some of them came as students. Some of them came as trainees, and some of them got a full time job.

Sharif Rashad: Would you care to mention a few of those students here that were here when you came?

Dr. Moin: We are talking about 40 years ago, and I'm 75 years of age now so you can imagine my memory. My memory is not very sharp, and if you wanted to name some of the students, I mean I'll be able to recall, but most of them have moved out. After they have completed the study they got jobs elsewhere, and therefore they moved out, but since it was a smaller community there were all very --

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Dr. Moin: -- close to each other, and that was a good commodity also when we used to meet at the University of Tennessee in the student center it was a lot of fun. Then occasionally we used to have the celebration of the religious rituals also together such as Eid, or any other occasion. It used to be a lot of fun.

Sharif Rashad: So we mentioned how you were involved in the community quite often, and even that you are one of the founders of Masjid Al-Salam. Would you like to mention any other founders that inspired you to do so?

Dr. Moin: Yeah way back, as I was saying, we started our religious/social meetings at the student center at the University of Tennessee, but soon we realized that on certain --

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Dr. Moin: -- such as Christmas or Thanksgiving the center used to be closed, and if that Sunday happens to fall very close to Christmas or to Thanksgiving then we could not meet together. Therefore at that

time we felt that there is a need to have our own Islamic center. Therefore we started collecting the funds to buy either a piece of land, or a small property preferably less expensive, because as I said there was not too many Muslims, and therefore it was difficult to collect large sums of money, and therefore we finally were successful in locating the house that we bought in 1978. It was at 1065 Stratford where the current Masjid Al-Salam is located.

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Dr. Moin: That house was a 36 year old house, was hardly 12 or 1,300 square feet. So it was very small, hardly two rooms. Still the community was also not large so it might be 20 to 25 people with about 7, 8, 10 families, and we used to get together there mostly on Sundays. Then as the time progressed, we realized that there was an increasing number of Muslims, and there were no classrooms there that we could have, and we could not teach adequately the students. Therefore we started building a Masjid, and what was good about that property was that –

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Dr. Moin: -- there was 1.1 acre of land that came with that small house. So we again collected money, collected the funds, and started constructing the mosque, which was subsequently completed in 1984. So that was the first Masjid that we really had, and we named the Masjid Al-Salam, and it was inaugurated by Sheikh Jamal Badawi, an Egyptian Muslim scholar of international reputation. We were so glad that he was able to come, and spend some time with us at the time of inauguration.

Sharif Rashad: So let's talk about how the Mosque, the Masjid felt. Did you feel any concerns about them, or any other issues?

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Dr. Moin: Well when we bought that house, and even there was an intervening period for about six years. We bought the house in 1978, and we build the Mosque in 1984. So there was six years between those events. During that time, we as a Muslim group a couple of times went around our neighborhood of the Masjid, and we tried to introduce ourselves to them. We told them that we are Muslims, and these are our tenants in Islam, and we have populous in Islam, and what are the Islamic values. They were surprised to know that there is a significant overlap in the doctrines, or in the

principals of Christianity and Islam. For example, there were surprised to know that Jesus Christ is –

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Dr. Moin: -- also a very important prophet for us in Islam. So they were very comfortable with our presence. So we did not have any friction or any rift with any of the religious groups.

Sharif Rashad: I'm glad to hear. So let's talk about a time period shortly after 911.

Dr. Moin: 911, yes. 911 as we all know was an extremely important, but very tragic event, and in the aftermath of 911 there was heightened apprehensions among the Muslims, in fact the degree of fear among the Muslims, because of repercussions –

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Dr. Moin: -- in this. So what we quickly decided in the aftermath of 9/11 was that we will have open house sessions. We'll open the doors for our Masjid, or Mosque, and invite the neighboring Christians to come and talk to us, and we let them know about Islam, and they can let us know more about the Christian values, etc. Then one more important thing that we did was we started visiting the churches, and give speeches about the pillars of Islam, and about the knowledge of Islam. I would like to acknowledge here that Dr. Jamil Akbik, who is a physician good friend of mine, --

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Dr. Moin: -- he did a wonderful job in spreading the word. He and I used to visit the churches, and mainly he used to give speeches, and he educated many groups of people about Islam. That really laid the anxieties among the Christians, and they were surprised to know the truth about Islam. That Islam is not what the media had given them the impression about in this, and in fact many believed that there were a lesser number of racially motivated events in many cities in the United States, but not much in Memphis, and one of the reasons for this decrease in the number of frictions between Christians –

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Dr. Moin: -- and Muslims in the city of Memphis was a result of the speeches by Dr. Jamil Adbik.

Sharif Rashad: Can you talk to us a little bit more about Jamil Adbik to us?

Dr. Moin: Dr. Jamil Adbik is originally from Syria, and he's a physician. He's still here in Memphis, and he has been a very active member in the Muslim society of Memphis, and he was a good educator. He used to give a lot of educational sessions in Islamic history, and in theology.

Sharif Rashad: So how did the community grow prior to 911, and after as well? Were there any major differences? Obviously there were, but anything notable.

Dr. Moin: As far as the number of Muslims coming to Memphis with concern it was on the rise –

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Dr. Moin: -- right from 1970 on. So in 1980s there were more Muslims, and in 1990s there were still more Muslims than were in 1980, and so on. There was no significant exodus of Muslims out of Memphis. It's not that a large number of Muslims suddenly left Memphis for one reason or another. So the number Muslims were gradually increasing. I wish I had the numbers to tell us how many Muslims were there in Memphis in 1970 and 1980, and 1990, you know every decade how much there was an increase. I don't have that information. Maybe I should look on the internet and try to find that out, but there was a gradual increase in the number of Muslims throughout the last 40 years that I have been here.

Sharif Rashad: So what was your reaction to 911 exactly?

Dr. Moin: What was my reaction to 911? To speak the truth I was really scared, --

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Dr. Moin: -- because it was a very disastrous, no doubt about it, but one thing that I really appreciated, and that was that terrific was I still remember the third day after 911 we were all scared, and in the Masjid. There came a white Christian couple in the Mosque, and I was standing right in the entrance of the door of the Masjid. The couple came to me, and said, the husband and wife, they introduced themselves to me. I'm so and so and all that, and the man told me that we thought that you may need some protection,

and I'll be glad to take you to the grocery store, or for shopping, or for doing any grocery as –

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Dr. Moin: -- your companion, and I'll try to protect you from any harm. I almost cried at that time. On the one hand we heard that incidents of how the Mosque in other cities in the United States were stoned at, and the windows were broken, and many things happened, and on the other hand we had a couple right here in the city of Memphis who were so nice, who were so kind, who were so considerate, who were so understanding that they came and offered their help to us, and that gave us the confidence, and in fact that also triggered out attempts to have the open house for Masjid, and invite the people so that –

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Dr. Moin: -- we can exchange ideas, and learn more about Islam, and give true information about Islam unlike in the media.

Sharif Rashad: So did the Mosque have to take any precautions after 911? I know you mentioned about other states, and how people would even stone the Masjid.

Dr. Moin: Yeah there was a time when, for example, during the Isha prayers, one or two people would sit outside, and not join the congregational prayer. They would sit outside, and just watching if anybody is coming in or what. It never happened, but that kind of practice continued for maybe a couple of months or so, and then realizing that no negative incidents happened then we stopped the practice.

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Sharif Rashad: So what did you do personally to help the community after?

Dr. Moin: Well I also used to sit outside the Mosque watching the building at the time the Isha prayers were going in. So I used to pray later, and probably you want me to tell you about my involvement in the society of Muslims society of Memphis. In 1978 when we bought that house that I was talking to you about, organizational changes appeared. We formulated a constitution, and we established educational programs in that, and I was involved in the teaching program as well as asking people to please come and join our group, and let us work together, and let us pray together, and –

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Dr. Moin: -- we want to increase the social circle. These were the activities that most of got involved including myself.

Sharif Rashad: Interesting. So obviously Memphis has changed quite a lot since you've got here.

Dr. Moin: Certainly, yes.

Sharif Rashad: What are the changes?

Dr. Moin: Most in terms of the number of Muslims for example, and also if you really compared the educational activities that we used to do in the 1970s and '80s versus what we do now must be increased 10 fold of educational activities. The quality and the quantity both have improved tremendously in the last 20 years.

Sharif Rashad: So as an elder, what would you give advice to as far as community to younger Muslims leaders?

Dr. Moin: Younger Muslims, I would say devotion, dedication, and please have a high –

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Dr. Moin: -- level of interest in the people of your own religion. Not that you have to be empathetic towards the other people, but it's just that you should get involved in Muslim activities. You should try to help the people, both the Muslims and the non-Muslims; because Islam does not say that you just have to help the Muslims alone. As a result of that, for example, we are having an interfaith annual event on 13th of July at Esplanade, and there are about 400 to 500 people usually are invited, and these consist of the Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, people of all faiths, and we break the bread that evening. We break the fast –

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Dr. Moin: -- with all these people. we have dinner. We have speeches. This time the theme of this is stop hunger, because hunger is quite prevalent. Many people are not aware of the extent of hunger in the world. More than 1 billion people go to sleep with no food in their stomachs. So collectively we have to do something to take care of this problem.

Sharif Rashad: Exactly, so what did the Masjid have to do after they figured out that the population was growing significantly? What changes did they have to make in order to accommodate all these people?

Dr. Moin: With the increasing membership –

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Dr. Moin: -- at the Masjid of Islam, the education activities also increased. We used to divide our educational activities for children according to the age also. For example, below the age of seven, certain instructions were given between the ages of 7 and 12 there were more advanced courses in Islam, and then over the age of 12 similarly higher levels of religious education. With these kinds of activities came the responsibility as well.

Sharif Rashad: Speaking of education for Muslims here, do you know any programs and specifics you guys offer?

Dr. Moin: Well we have a full time Islamic school, Pleasant View School, located on Bartlett Road, which came into existence –

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Dr. Moin: -- in mid 1990s, and currently that is the only full time Islamic school here in Memphis, and the classes used to go up to seventh or eighth grade have now gone up to the high school as well on this. So we are proud of having that Islamic school.

Sharif Rashad: Good, good. What do you think the future of the Muslim community in Memphis will be like?

Dr. Moin: The future of Islam or the Muslims in Memphis will depend upon people like you, young people. I'm kind of a little bit disappointed to say that not too many young people come to the Masjid for whatever the reason may be. Partially the reason could be that our –

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Dr. Moin: -- programs are not attractive enough for the generation. Our fault, our means the organizers fault, or it may be because of lack of interest among the younger generation, but at least at Masjid of Islam we rarely see children and teens that come to the Masjid. We need to have attractive programs that can facilitate the younger

people to come more often to the Masjid, learn more about Islam, and therefore I would say that the future of Islam is really going to be on your shoulders, and one day the current generation of these senior people just like myself are going to go away, will die, and they will be –

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Dr. Moin: -- replaced by people like you, and therefore you should be able to handle the responsibilities of organizing, and building up Muslim communities.

Sharif Rashad: I'd like to finish off this interview by asking if there's anything else you'd like to talk to us about?

Dr. Moin: I would say that if you can ask your friends of your age, of course, to visit the Mosque, and please point out the weaknesses in our programs or the deficiencies in our programs so that we can correct it. Whatever you wish to have done in the Masjid, let us know so that we can provide those facilities to you that way we can have a larger number of youngsters coming to the Masjid, and therefore the future of Islam and Muslims in America will be bright.

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Sharif Rashad: So you're asking for more constructive criticism, correct, from our age group?

Dr. Moin: Yes, and even if it's a destructive criticism, it doesn't matter. We'll tolerate it, but yes we'd prefer constructive criticism.

Sharif Rashad: Thank you for your time.

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