



Habeeb Quadri



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Interviewer: Chad Comello
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Transcriber: Elizabeth Ceisel

INTRODUCTION

Habeeb Quadri is the principal of the MCC Academy in Morton Grove and an author/lecturer on Islam and social problems confronting Muslim youth. Born in Chicago to Indian immigrants, Habeeb is a first-generation American and son of one of the founders of Chicago's Muslim Community Center. After moving to Morton Grove as a kid, he lived through the contentious referendum to block the MCC's purchase of the former Borg school in Morton Grove and the attacks on the Muslim community, but also recalls the interfaith civic support they received after the referendum was voted down.

In this interview, he reflects on growing up while trying to balance his Muslim faith with American culture and sports, taking an eye-opening trip to India as a teen, being a school principal after the September 11 attacks, and working to make Muslims part of the Morton Grove tapestry.

HQ: Habeeb Quadri

Q: Question asked by interviewer, Chad Comello

Q: Did you grow up here? Were you born here?

HQ: So I myself am a Chicago Public Schools product. I remember preschool and high school. Went to Von Steuben. My dad came in 1960 and was one of the founders of the Muslim Community Center, which is officially in Elston, Chicago. Then we purchased this building. Now Skokie is the third school campus. So I've been around, but then when we bought this building, because the Chicago masjid does not have a play area, we all used to drive up here on Friday nights—Friday night basketball, our youth day. So it was probably the youth groups that played a part there, so we would come up here.

Q: So were those some of your earliest memories?

HQ: Yes. That was since I was like 13 or 14. So that's what I remember. Even when it was 1989, '90 when we first bought it, I was just a young kid. I just remember going to houses and dropping off flyers [for the building referendum]. I didn't even really understand the details of what we were trying to do, but the idea was to give a better idea of who we are and why you should vote "No".

Q: So you didn't really understand the bigger picture of it?

HQ: The whole bigger picture, I mean, at that time I knew they want to get the building back. I didn't understand the whole detailed meanings of it. But it was like, "Oh wow, so they don't want us to be here." That's the mindset that you have. So we want to buy this building, but they don't want us. They want to buy it back. That's kind of weird. So you're looking at it from a younger perspective. Then going through the process and hearing the side conversations of the adults, we found out, OK, people *do* like us. People do want us here.

Then the idea of having a gym for the first time and playing sports for me was huge. I played quite a bit of it. That whole process was something so unique. What it shows to me is that there is always going to be people who are going to be negative or maybe have some concerns, and sometimes it's just out of fear. But the majority of people are good people and you interact with them. So one of the greatest things I've learned is that one of the greatest forms of learning is through interaction. When you interact you get a better understanding of people—why they're thinking that way. And I think that played a big part.

As a young kid, I'm in a community, and the school's developing, and then I graduate. I go to Michigan for four years, and I come back. Then 9/11 happens. I come back in 2002 and I'm the principal of the school. And now you're the principal of the school and you're just trying to make sure—because there's a lot of stuff going on—another tragedy doesn't happen. In the '90s the Gulf War was outside the boundaries of the United States of America. Now something happens

within... Man, that really changes the mindset of how people think. "Wait a minute, we can get hurt here." So I think that caused a lot of ripple effects in all mosques. You had hate even at our school. We got hate mail. We had a bomb threat. The FBI was involved; they had to close the school. So you try to see how all these play a part.

Because in the 1990s there was no Internet. Global information was still limited. Now it changes the volume. So 2001 and 2002, it's a bigger issue. And at the same time they're thinking of making an expansion of the mosque. So now you've got individuals everywhere throughout the United States having concerns: Who are these Muslims around us? What do they think? Are they Al Qaeda? Do they like Osama Bin Laden? All these fears. So now you have a situation where expansion is gonna happen, but there's a lot of people not happy with this at village hall meetings. There are a few neighbors really making a big concern about that, of fear.

I remember them saying, "This mosque, they're gonna have prayers out loud. They're gonna have it on the microphone. They might be linked to something..." There were some people throwing out some crazy accusations. But when this whole zoning issue happens, we get denied. And it's kind of crazy because if you look at it now and say that there's not enough space, well, that whole grass field, soccer field, is ours too. We purchased it even though there was a copy line. Right away we went through looked at the documents and knew that was part of the deal. But it gets denied. Then we're trying to have a

discussion, Department of Justice gets involved. It was in one of the newspapers, either *Boston Globe* or *New York Times*, I forget which one. (“A mosque proposal frays interfaith relations in Illinois”, *Boston Globe*, February 2004: accessible at goo.gl/8r7Jx8.) They pick it up because it’s the first mosque being built after 9/11. So you see some of these tensions.

One of the big things when I got there was, OK, well, what have we done? There might be some concerns, no doubt about it. Some of the concerns might be uncalled for, but as a Muslim community, what have we done to make sure we interact? To make sure we make people feel comfortable of who we are. We have to open our doors.

So it was also a wakeup call for our community. In our first generation of elders, when they first came they were all immigrants. The language barrier, even the cultural habits were quite a bit different. They were just trying to build these institutions and make sure that at least their kids know their faith, have a sense of identity, know who we are, so on and so forth.

Our second generation... I grew up here. I wore the same kind of clothing like any other American individual, Anglo-Saxons to African-Americans, anyone else. Same kind of music, same kind of food. Yes, maybe my belief is different. So this is where the second generation of individuals like me and a few others that came, we need to have those conversations with our community members, with our village officials, because there’s a lot of things we could talk about. We maybe don’t have to talk about our faith; we don’t have to talk about politics. We

can talk about other aspects. Sports is always an easy connector, an article, a book, food, doing service projects, all these aspects. I think that played a big part in how to slowly develop that. Making sure of the 9/11 services we attend, having interfaith programs.

Now we're part of the Morton Grove Thanksgiving Dinner. And the idea is not just going there, but hosting it ourselves sometimes. And having mosque open house. Those kinds of steps. Making sure our kids are doing service projects in the park districts. I remember they had this one mural and our kids helped out drawing it. We one time at the forest preserve said we are going to adopt this area to clean up. So those steps I think kind of help us to make sure we get involved in the community, and vice versa, the community getting to have a better experience.

When they interact they say, "Well, these kids talk the same as our kids do, they got the same things. They just want to make sure of safety, security, that our kids do well, are protected, happy, successful." And when you start interacting with people, you see a lot of them are professionals. They're the doctors in our community, they're engineers, they're teachers, they're civic leaders. I think more and more, that opened up the doors.

Because there were some drastic things that happened. I remember once driving and they had pigs flipped upside down with the American flag on it. We were trying to figure out what that was. Most of these houses were going towards the school. It was like a sign of distress. So you're like, *Wow*. I remember every

year we had a cinder block thrown through our window. We've had "Go back home you mother-effer" and other things spray-painted. So almost every year we used to have something.

Q: Was this your home?

HQ: No, the building. The school and the mosque. So always something going on. And now in the last two or three years we haven't. Yeah, we had that one unique situation with one of our neighbors shooting those air rifles through our windows. But I think what it shows is that sometimes through struggles, it opens up people's eyes to what we need to do. It makes human beings be human beings. It makes you say, "Let's go back and figure out why this is happening."

I'm really happy with the beauty of Morton Grove, because you saw civic leaders play a big part. Like the clergy. Father O'Neill from St. Martha's and Rabbi Cohen of Northwest Suburban Jewish Congregation at that time played a big part of getting their congregations and getting the support of civic faith-based leaders to say, "Hey, we need to support as they're going through this tough time," supporting the situation and building this mosque and how this could all be beneficial, and their congregation being open to us. I think those kinds of things... it's just a blessing in some ways. And then having individuals in the library say, "Hey, you're here, let's try to welcome you." Having the programs they provide to other public schools and saying we'll provide that here. That became a big thing.

The Morton Grove Fire Department had these poster contests and they included us for so many years. The D.A.R.E program was also at our school too. When you start seeing that, kids start seeing that. This is one of the big keys, which are different from when I grew up. Whenever we might have been called something negative, it was just maybe isolated incidents. Now the problem is, when a kid sees something or hears something, they go online and they can see it all everywhere. It's more like, "Oh my God, it wasn't isolated." I think a lot of people think that. That's the ballgame. That's the change.

Morton Grove I think has been a resource for other communities now. Like the relationship that we've had with the police department. I think that's been great. I had the opportunity where they had the chief of police of Chicago and Des Plaines and then we brought Morton Grove, and we had a talk about what are some of the things that we've been doing to build these relationships. Morton Grove let us do a quick sensitivity training for their police department: "You're dealing with some Muslims—here are some things to think about." That's nice. They walk through our building once a year just to kind of get familiar with what's going on. I think that having that for our police department, just always keeping in the loop and saying "Whatever you need" for resources or advice, they're there. I think that brings the closeness. You start seeing that from the leadership too. You have other mayors—Mayor DiMaria to Staackmann to other individuals before that—all kind of stepping in and helping and trying to understand the process. I think that goes a long way.

Q: Let's jump back a little bit. Tell me about your parents and your family that you know about, and growing up.

HQ: So for my parents, they're from a small town in India. For my dad, they saved up enough where he took a one-day train ride to New Delhi, took a boat ride to London, and then from London a boat ride to New York.

Q: When was that?

HQ: In 1960. And then from New York took a greyhound to Oklahoma State University. And this was from writing a letter and find that there there's this opportunity. He came there and in Oklahoma he did his master's in engineering. But after a year he found out Kansas State had in-state tuition for international students, so he transferred to Kansas State University. And there are growing pains, having no family here. They all pitched in their money and said, "We have enough money for two months. After that you've got to figure out how to make do." This is without Internet, cell phones. That played a big part. So they went to Kansas State and in Kansas State he got his degree and came to Chicago.

Q: When did he get married?

HQ: Oh yeah, so he finished up in '64 and got married. I think my mom came in '65. So he went got married, had to do the paperwork to bring her here with a visa, something that took about six months.

Q: From India?

HQ: India.

Q: So they were already together?

HQ: No, no, so this becomes a cultural thing. Someone in their community, from their village, the city that they lived in... the parents played a part in the relationship. The parents say there are some individuals that we think should meet that we think would be a good suitor to get them married to. So he went there, met her, this and that, and they finally got married. But he was just like, "Look, I need to get back to work" and so on and so forth. So she came. So they were there in '65, had my older sister in '69. He worked for the city of Chicago for about 25-30 years as an engineer, a structural engineer.

Q: So he came to Chicago for work?

HQ: Yeah, for work. He worked in a private part. When we first moved to Chicago we lived in what they call public housing, until he just got himself comfortable, got set. First was private and finally got the city job. He was there for many years, as a structural engineer. You know, you went through growing pains as a minority, kind of forgot how to get a position, so it took a little longer. I think the private job sometimes was tougher. Finally, I think the city was more diverse and he had the qualifications. And he was there for some time.

He started one of the first Muslim institutions in Chicago. He was one of the five founders of the first immigrant masjid in Chicago. And then that created an offset of all these others. So Chicago is kind of unique in some ways. We even have a CIOGC (Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago) that encompasses 65, 70 other mosques. Each one is independent, but in all the other states in the United States, this is the one that has its own governing body. I think Houston is the only other one. Chicago has the most Islamic schools than any other state. We have about, in Chicagoland, I'd say about 13 or 14. And in that we even have a council, which I chair.

Chicago was the first in the United States to have—at Devon, north of Chicago—it's like Indo-Pakistani food. And halal meat played a big part. Chicago was one of the first places where you could get halal meat. So it's been a kind of trendsetter, like a trailblazer for many different things that have come up.

Q: Where did you live in Chicago growing up?

HQ: I lived in the north side of Chicago, by Kimball and Foster. Our first years were there. What's happened is through time, everyone lived there, but slowly people started moving to the Lincolnwood/Skokie area. And as more and more people moved to the northern suburbs, that drive... why not try to see if we can find something in the Morton Grove area? Borg, the official name of the school that we bought, was going on sale. Then it was a back and forth discussion: should we buy it, should we not. It was an auction, and what's amazing is... one thing about our faith is you can't really take loans, like interest loans. So everyone pitched in, about 30, 40, 50, or 60 people. You had to have some amount just to get into the bid. So you had personal checks everyone's just bringing in together and just getting it done. So it was a real community effort.

Q: How much more beyond that did you need?

HQ: After that, when they got it, then three or four or five individuals—may God bless 'em—they mortgaged their house. So there was a risk factor, but they said, "For the community, it's gonna happen." They were our guarantors.

Q: And when was that?

HQ: 1988, '89, when we were trying to purchase the building. So that's how it happened. In '89 they used to have the prayers in the gymnasium. In 1990 they began the school with 25 kids and it slowly trickled: kindergarten to first, first to second, third to fourth. Our own community went through its growing pains. We had people saying, "There's great school districts here. Do we need to have this? Should we not have this? We need to make sure our kids have some foundation of who they are." So I think that became the thing. So the school the first 10 years had maybe 285 here and there—people trying to figure out if they want to do this.

Then in 2002, when I got there, there were about 200 kids. The school's somewhat in deficit. Should we do this? Because people were like, "Maybe after four years we'll step away." And then from 2002 to now we have a blessing of 675 kids, K-8. Our weekend school was even bigger then, in the '90s. Even with the full-time school there was a weekend school. Even the weekend school is about 300 kids. Even at a point it was Saturday and Sunday because there was so many kids. The Chicago campus has an afterschool program and our Morton Grove campus has the afterschool weekend program. Then from there we also did afterschool programs and night classes, so we have maybe another 50, 60 kids that come for night classes. So overall, at the Morton Grove campus, there are maybe 600, 700, 800 kids learning throughout the week. So it's kind of been a unique thing.

And this is something that's great about this whole city, Morton Grove. Niles West and North—this is how I feel some great stuff about the community here—outside of Dearborn, Michigan, we're the only other school district that has Eid Al-Adha off for all the kids. One of our holidays. It's recognized as a day off. Because they used to have Rosh Hashanah and stuff. So that was kind of unique. I think they call it Institute Day, just to make things easier, but for them to think about that is nice.

Also, what's really cool about this area... so Chicago, Von Steuben High School, where I went to high school, is the first high school in the United States to let kids pray after school for their Friday services. Our religious day is Friday. Sunday is for the Christian faith, Saturday is for the Judaic faith, and on Fridays for us it's at noon. So what would happen is that some of the young kids—when you reach age of puberty it's mandatory for you to pray, so they set aside a place for us to pray after school. The second school ever in the United States was Niles West. One of our kids who kind of grew up in this area is Azhar Usman, so he kind of played a big part. He was a famous Muslim comedian. So that was the second-ever place. Now in Chicago there are about 70 schools that do that or are open to that. So this community has really been progressive in some ways.

It has its tough times, it has its moments, but I honestly think there's been some uniqueness of how people of Morton Grove have played a big part. Morton Grove people are like, "Hey, you know what, it's been great here," so if people can't find a house here or Skokie, people move into the Glenview area because

of this Morton Grove campus. So I think that's kind of played a big part and that's helped us be part of the Fourth of July parade and so on and so forth, all these other things.

Q: What was it like for you being a first-generation American and balancing that culture that you were growing up in with the culture of your ancestors and your family, your parents, who were immigrants? What was it like living in that balance for you?

HQ: It's unique because my parents, they've come from a country where there's a lot of poverty. He was the first one to be educated, getting a college degree. He changed the whole life of everyone else. Him having his degree means all his siblings came here and they all got their degrees. That means my life's changed. So that played a big part.

I went to go back home to India. It was the most humbling experience. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. At twelve, thirteen years old, I was there for two and a half months and I hated it. Because in Old City, India, when you go there, you can't drink the water. You have to boil it. You have to go outside in the well and get the water for boiling. So what happens is you have that situation, to electricity goes out every four or five hours, to the bathroom is on the ground, and the water for you in the bathroom for cleaning up. You can't take showers every day; you have to kind of go every other day. And I was like,

“What the heck?” But when my parents came here, they’d be like, “Look, it’s so important that what you do, it’s not about you; it’s about you and the community and where you live” and so on. That changed my mindset, because now I realize that I have an opportunity, and I need to make sure I can take care of it. But at the same time he’s like, “You have this opportunity, but you got to also remember who you are.”

So there’s cultural habits like eating food, making sure you respect others’ food and clothing. One major part, at least in our family, is being Muslim. Islam was kind of unique because when I came here you met Muslims from all over different countries. So he said, “I really got to know my faith more, separating it from culture.” Because sometimes culture and faith get mixed. When I go and talk to schools about Islam, it’s always mixed up. When people think of 1.5 billion Muslims, they always think of Arabs. That’s only 18% of the Muslim population. Majority of Southeast Asia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, then Africa... then like in our school, a big population is from the Balkans, Yugoslavia. Which, I had no idea. I had no idea until I was in high school, until the war, that there were Muslims from Bosnia. I had a buddy who was my buddy for three years and never told me he was Muslim, and he himself didn’t know he was Muslim. His mom said it was because of the communism. So there was just a uniqueness of that.

One of the big things before that was that fear. I played sports. In baseball, my coach said to my dad, “I want your son to travel.” My dad said, “No,

he's playing enough. Just take care of your grades." High school, finally my coach came to my house. I said, "You gotta talk to my dad." And he was like, "Your son could maybe get a scholarship to play ball." "Wait, you mean tuition is gonna be paid for?" "Yes." "Oh." [laughter] I remember junior and senior year I played on this traveling team and my father would call in the morning for my morning prayers: "You need to wake up." And he said, "If you travel, your coach, you have to be his roommate." I was like, "What the heck, dad?! Are you serious?" And it was crazy because every time we'd travel—even at nighttime, in the hotel—10 o'clock he would call, 12 o'clock he would call. This was before cell phones, so you gotta be where you are. So it was the whole idea of, we want you to experience this but we don't want you to lose the idea of who you are, your identity, your faith. That's one of the reasons the Islamic school even began: to make sure our kids benefit from all the resources, but also to make sure at least they know who they are. Because if not, there's nothing wrong with assimilating, but just make sure you don't lose what makes you who you are. And faith plays a big part.

So it's been great, because one thing about America is you've got people from all over, so then you really understand faith. It's great to know your culture, but culture doesn't surpass faith. That's been one of the toughest parts, the clash—why can't you do this or have that. A lot of stuff that we, even in the second generation, in religious studies we teach a class on social issues. I've written a book called *War Within the Heart: Struggles of the Muslim Youth*. So we

have issues like when we get married can we pick who we want—because culturally the parents make a decision. So faith-wise, parents do support, are a part of the decision making, but you can figure out who you want. But there are parameters when you are courting: that there are persons around you, you can't be by yourself, because that could lead to something else. So there are these rules and regulations. When you came here people are like, "Let's look at the texts and see what does faith say." I think having these understandings and kind of clarifying, that's opened up new writings.

When we wrote that book, it started out as something small, but now it's like all over the United States. I go and talk to individuals. I just gave a talk in California about the Muslim second-generation, with our scholars and asking how do we live here and deal with that. For parents, we have a book that I co-authored called *Parenting: Who Said It Was Easy?* looking at it from a faith-plus-living-here kind of perspective. That's opened up to that transition. So our generation has been like, "It's great, elders, what you have done. How do we take it to the second tier, understanding some core values that you've reminded us of, which are important to us, but understanding it in an American context." Plus, now, with all this other media and Islamophobia, which is coming, how do we deal with all that?

The first generation was to become a doctor or become an engineer. That's what it was. I was a black sheep. Going into education as a guy was way out of the blue. When I first came to my school I was the only other guy. Maybe a

religious studies teacher was a man, but all the other spiritual teachers were ladies. It was just very unique. But luckily my parents were like, “No problem, we want you to do it.”

Q: You wanted to become a teacher?

HQ: Yeah.

Q: When did you figure that out?

HQ: I used to work in youth groups, so I used to do a lot of the youth camps in the summer. Over time, at like 18 or 19, I started running them. Then in high school I think sports played a big part. They gave me a lot of confidence. I was like the Big Brother Big Sister throughout high school, keeping an eye on anyone. And through time I did Project Education Plus. This was something I had a passion for and enjoyed, so even at the university level I worked with Future Teachers of America. I think more and more I thought, “This is what I want to do.” I enjoy it. Sometimes people give you skills where you can work with individuals. Like I was the president of MSA (Muslim Students Association). It was one of the maybe largest ones in all the other universities in this area. I just kinda trickled itself, like I’m gonna go into this. Over time, I taught at Niles North for the “People and Their

Cultures” class. I was a history teacher. I did my intro on Roberto Clemente, then I went to Cesar Chavez.

In Detroit my wife was finishing her medical school, then I came back. When you come to Islamic school, because your funds are limited, you’re kinda doing everything. So here I’m the community liaison as well, so it just encompassed other things. That’s opened up new things like the Cook County Muslim Advisory Board, Homeland Security, faith-based advisory board. You realize what we’re doing here is not just here in Chicagoland, but even on a national level. Like I’d share with Muslim Youth of North America, the governing body for all Muslim youth programs.

Q: Is your wife from Chicago? Is this where you met her?

HQ: No, she is from Michigan.

Q: Is that where you went to school?

HQ: Yeah, so this is kind of unique. It’s more from a third individual that told me about her. I was giving a lecture there [laughter]. It was a friend of ours who we’re close friends with—as I told you I work with youth on a national level, so it was kind of through another friend that kind of played a part, so it was kind of unique. Then I was there for my master’s.

Q: In Michigan?

HQ: Yeah, I worked in Detroit, so I had a free ride at Wayne State, and she went to Michigan.

Q: Oh, OK.

HQ: I was there four or five years. Got married and then we came back here.

Q: Was that the plan? You wanted to come back to Chicago?

HQ: Yeah, yeah. I grew up here. This was my hometown, my folks... We're only two siblings. My sister lives in California, so being the son... I always was involved in the community, so it kind of worked itself out. I knew the dynamics: who are the elders, who's this, what you gotta deal with. So that helped out. And that trust factor helped. For me I think, God willing, most likely I'm gonna live my whole life here. I'm most likely gonna die here. My kids are gonna live here. And for me, I'm an American. I love this country. But I'm Muslim. So how do you keep that American Muslim experience? How do we make sure our narrative is going to be part of this story line in the next hundred years? I think that's been the key. What I'm trying to show our community is that overall everyone wants the same thing.

Yes, there's always gonna be outliers. We have outliers. We've got some crazy people right now doing some crazy stuff, hijacking the faith. So those are outliers. Thus you're going to have some individuals in this country that might say stuff, but those are your outliers. The majority of the people are just good people and the only way you're going to figure that out is if you're experiencing it. So that's what the second generation has done. If you go to school here, you hang out, you do that. Even our own kids who are at an Islamic school, we make sure that they're involved in the community, because you want to have that experience. Having that, even in the first eight years, just having that foundation of who you are will help that. Because we're gonna have our moments: why can't we do this or why can't we have that, why can't we date and what's the reason of that... clothing... You have your challenges.

I will say, before Michael Jordan, guys have to wear shorts over your knees. Back when I grew up, shorts were tight, but now it's kinda back in fashion again. But I had to take sweatpants and cut 'em, so I was really the long shorts guy—it was really me! [laughter] But Jordan made it popular! So those are the kinds of things. I'm like, "Look, coach, I have to wear like this." It was something they didn't understand. A lot of times it was hard to communicate what you're getting at, because you were kind of uncomfortable. So that's where now, with the writings and trainings, we say these are things that you might be going through and you might not understand why. Like boys and girls can't be in the same swimming class together. Those are the new challenges. But what's great

is the people understanding and being accommodating. That means these are individuals who are doing that. There are people who might get heat. So when the principal says, "OK, we'll do that," that means I try and tell our community that they are gonna be taking some heat from some other people. But this is where they understand, because if they feel like there's a value to it and respect and there's an alternative project or service that you have to do, people are accommodating. I'm a think-positive kind of person. Think positive things and good things could happen.

Q: What's it like now being a parent? How many kids do you have?

HQ: I have three.

Q: What's it like being on the other side of the family dynamic? You used to be the child of immigrants and wrestling with that balance. But now you're the one sort of enforcing it or having that environment. So what's it like being on the other side of it?

HQ: It's funny, as you get older, you sometimes realize: Now I know why my parents were doing that. You don't like to admit it, but there's wisdom in age. No doubt about it. You sometimes just go through things and start saying, "Now I know." And I think a lot of times, it's so important that what you do and what you say play

a big part. One of the things I always realized is whenever my parents told me to do something, I saw them do it themselves. So I couldn't always call 'em on it and say, like, "Man, you're telling me to go out and read this..." Well, you're always reading too. Like we were very limited on TV watching. I didn't really watch too much TV at home, unless it was sports. But now I have that same rule: no screen time Monday through Friday, but I have to have alternatives. So there's reasons. I see some benefits. But the challenge also is, now they're at a time when there's just so much...

My older daughters have a better understanding of what's going on. It was funny, she was driving—we were on Lake Shore Drive—and she sees the Trump Tower and she goes, "Can Muslims walk in there?" And I laughed. And I was like, "Oh, she seriously believes that, 'cause she didn't laugh." I kinda laughed, but when she looked at me, I saw she's not laughing; she really thinks that! Then I realized, *Wow*. Because now friends are saying it, people show videos, like, "Oh, check this out." So I think it's saying, being Muslim, there's nothing wrong with it. Yes, there are these crazy individuals—ISIS and all these who are hijacking—but then you have to learn history and see that there have always been, in every group, extreme individuals. You had the Protestants and Catholic wars for many years. You have abortion clinics bombed. You have Hitler using faith as a way to get through. You have the Ku Klux Klan and slavery, where all these people went to religion, but still justify this. That's why it's so important to read history and say this is not just your own faith. Our thing is, they hate us, but it's OK being Muslim.

It's crazy, the parents are kind of like "Don't forget" and yeah, I'm cool with being Muslim. It wasn't like a pressure. Only when movies came out. Like I remember in the '80s when *Gandhi* came out. Man, I used to hear it. "Gandhi! Dot head! I'm gonna shoot you! Target practice!" All these comments after comments. Then the '90s was Saddam Hussein. When I played ball, I remember at one school—I'm not gonna say the school's name—and they started chanting "U-S-A" when I was shooting a free throw. And I was having a good game too... Now it would be on video; it would be big-time, but back then I just dealt with it. It was always like "Saddam! Saddam!" just to get on your nerves. This is back in the Chicago Public Schools when you had to take public buses to every game. It wasn't like you had a school bus.

Now it's at another level. Because now, suppose I had my Facebook: people can make comments—hey you, blah blah blah. Or kids can look up who you are. So I think that's why we have the Islamic schools. And for our kids, we need to make sure they have a strong foundation of who they are. Because even the second generation, some kids didn't know too much of their faith, so what are they gonna teach the next generation? So I think some schools more than ever have played a big part in saying, "At least be proud of who you are." Because we know the American culture and we'll make sure they'll be introduced to that, but sometimes it's hard to teach your own kid. Sometimes you'll have someone else be like, "Here's your foundation." Because you don't want to just be Muslim by name and say, "Oh, we're just Muslim." No, it's not wrong. You want to practice

faith and have people have God-consciousness in the correct way, of not using God in vain to hurt people. If you have individuals having that, that plays a big part. So that's kind of the new scenario.

I'm going to cities, small towns... it's not easy. I went to Monroe, Louisiana, and talked to some kids there and some other cities. When you're the few, there's a lot of comments. And now, it's crazy because even when a kid makes a comment, it's like, "Well, why can't I say it? The elected officials are saying it." So it's justification. So how do we make sure our kids still understand, practice our faith, not having fear. Some ladies have taken their scarves off because they don't want to be attacked. Look, they make their decision on their own. You know what's best for you and your safety. But those are the questions.

Do I want to change my name... Even in the second generation, some kids had to because of the small towns. I mean, I got made fun of here and there, but some people made their names from Musa to Moose, or Mikael to Mike, Dawood to David, just to be like, "Look, man, I'm Dave, dude!" [laughter]

Q: You didn't feel tempted to do that?

HQ: No. You know, it was funny, I have my nickname called Habs. It was great because I remember one time at my junior high, they were like, "Why don't you put away your name and just call it Habs?" My dad said no. I was like, "Why not?" It was great forethought, because he was like, "Why don't you just call

yourself Habeeb?” “Because they call me Habs.” “But why, did you ask them to?” “No, they called me that.” “That’s the reason why?” And I’m like, “I never thought about it that way.” It just became a thing. The coach just made a suggestion and my dad said no. At that time I didn’t even realize that it became so much, but that’s your name! You can have your own nickname on the side. But he’s like, “Are you not comfortable with it?” And I thought about it and maybe that’s the reason why. I remember that was in sixth, seventh grade, and after that I was like, nah... My name’s Quadri. Buddies call me Habs. But when I’m gonna represent, I’m Habeeb Quadri. Uniforms, high school, colleges—that’s my name. For close people, yeah, whatever, my nickname. But printed? It was a good time to learn. Sixth, seventh grade you’re like *Ughhh*, but later on you’re like, *Wow*. So it was a unique moment.

HQ: What’s it like living in Morton Grove these days? When did your family move here?

Q: We moved about seven, eight years ago. It’s been great. Great town. We’re close to our mosque. Our neighbors are great. Everyone kinda keeps an eye on everything. The school districts are great, safety, crime is very limited. Small towns are great because you get to know everyone. You kind of pop into places to meet them. You have the opportunity to meet with village officials. Like our mayor visits, sometimes you see police officers just as you’re walking with your

kids. Like Commander Yaris, I seem him all the time. How many chief of police are like, "Hey, here's my cell phone if you need anything for the community." Or even the mayor. And me as the liaison, having that, helping them. Now we have some people in the village commissions. So there are individuals who are slowly getting more and more active in our local community, local government, which is important. What's also good is that we're not like, "Hey, we need a spot." It's more at least open the doors. I think that's great. When people ask, I say that's something unique about us: that in Morton Grove there are these opportunities.

Yes, there were some dark days, but overall we got through it, not just because of ourselves but also because of the people in Morton Grove. Because of the individuals from the clergy to the neighbors to government officials. Everyone had to play a part. Some maybe weren't happy with the government and didn't want us, but in the long run it has. So I look at it in that way, because nowhere in life throughout history anywhere has anything been easy. But if you hang in there, have good intentions, work together, interact, understand both sides, see it from their angle and see it from our angle, then you can move forward. And that's something that I've felt, that Morton Grove has opened those doors. Yes, there are going to be those moments and we can think about it for the rest of our lives, that's fine. But even in our own countries, I was reminded, we've got challenges too. So I think that's what's been the beauty of it, and I only feel like it's going to build more and more. The population's changed. I know some people might not be happy, but that's what it is. But the housing market's

gone up here. You can't complain that Muslims came in... because that was one of the issues back in 2002: "the market's gonna go down." I'm like, "Well, let's see."

I feel like we have a lot of bright kids in our senior year class. I don't know how many seniors who were graduating are Muslims, but at least 25 of them were Illinois State scholars. I'm thinking at most maybe 50 Muslim seniors at Niles West and North. I'm thinking that's like 50% of all the seniors. So kids are doing well. We've had some of our students be salutatorian before. Some of them have done really well at Niles West and were playing in sports.

One of our Morton Grove young ladies who went here, lived here, played soccer, traveling team here, the *Chicago Tribune* and *Sun Times* did an article about her wearing a scarf. Because she was a good player, now I think she's playing junior college or something. Our first girl who played basketball, twelve years ago, the *Tribune* had a whole back page about her, because she was a good player and wearing a scarf and doing it. This year we had *Tribune*—even WNBA called us—because our middle school girls basketball team went to regional finals in the state. They just got nervous, because they really could've won that game. We lost by five and that team that they lost to won again.

But it shows that idea that people feel comfortable. I really believe kids could walk around here and not feel like, "OK, should I tell I'm a Muslim?" And it's great because at Niles West and North there's just so much diversity; it's opened up. I honestly believe due to Morton Grove or Skokie and all these areas—

Morton Grove being the base of our Muslim community—has become an example for others to see how you can have minorities and other faiths live together. It kind of blossomed in some ways. A lot of people don't realize. Maybe because I work from a national level, you get to see other communities, and we're not that bad... People want to know how do you do this, and I think that's a big thing. You're not always going to agree about everything, but that's how you get there.

It's like how at the library we have our own play, here at the library. They've been open doors to us. The first time we first talked about it, it was like, "What is this, how is that," but now every year it's no problem. That's beautiful, because now you're letting them in and everyone else can be exposed to a Muslim sciences play. Kids can perform and see they're open to letting you perform, know about your storyline and history. That's a game changer, having someone like Brenda [Glenn, former school services liaison] coming in and speaking to our kids and saying I'm gonna take our time here. She could say I'm too busy, I don't have to come to private school. But to do that... To me, she doesn't *have* to come out to private school, but she wants to do it; she's kept on doing it for so many years. That plays a big part. You guys always informing us, "Hey, we have this new thing here, here are the new programs that we have." Because, it could be, "Do we really want them here?" But when you're making those moves... Just even this interview. Just saying, "Let's get someone from the community" shows me that we are part of the fabric of Morton Grove. That's

huge, because when people see later on a video or a transcript of it, it's like, "Oh, they did think about us. We're a part of this." Because ten, fifteen, twenty years down the line, you can say things happen, but this is where we are. It's amazing!

I purposely moved in here; I said I'm gonna live in Morton Grove. Maybe had an opportunity in Glenview here and there, but I'm like, "No, I'm gonna live in Morton Grove. We had this other place in Skokie, but I was like, "No, we're gonna move here." So it's been nice. Because at the end, yes, we have our own community, but it's also about that we have our own neighbors. We're citizens of Morton Grove, so how do we make Morton Grove better? What can we offer? Now, there's so many businesses. Like there's a dentistry that's Muslim-owned; there are about four or five restaurants that are Muslim-owned; a few of the gas stations in this area are Muslim-owned in Morton Grove. So even economic development more and more has come from our community. We're not just living in our own cocoon. No, we're trying to be the fabric and part of the Morton Grove community.

Q: That sounds like a great place to end right there!