

Bio: Anas Bensalah, Al Salam Mosque Member

Anas Bensalah, who is from Morocco, moved to Fort Smith in 2000 to attend college. He fell in love with a local woman, who was white and Christian. The two got married, even though her family refused to accept Anas. At the time, Anas believed he wasn't accepted because of his skin color. But looking back, he now thinks religion probably had something to do with it as well. His wife's family asked her why she "wasn't marrying her own kind." "White women are supposed to marry white men," they said.

When Anas's wife was in the hospital giving birth to their first child, her relatives stopped him from entering the building. Pleading with them outside, he says was one of the worst experiences of his life. He was not able to be with her when she gave birth to his son. "I saw the power of anger and ignorance," he said.

Determined, Anas wore down his in-laws with his wit and generosity. He kept at it and even helped one of his in-laws recover from a drug addiction.

Anas Bensalah is a member of the Al Salam Mosque in town. He took the day off to help with the clean up after vandals defaced the mosque in October 2016. He spoke of the racist symbols used in the attack: "A swastika is a small act of terrorism if you think about it." He added, "it's scary." Anas said that the symbols had their desired effect on the Muslim community because they were racist and threatening. Simple insults would not have gotten people's attention in the same way.

On the day of the clean up, Anas spoke to a man who called him, crying. The man explained that the vandals could not have been Christians, because no true Christian could have done this. Anas told him he could relate: that is exactly how he feels every time there is an attack by Islamic State.

Discuss the following:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about Anas Bensalah's experiences?
- How do you think Anas felt about what happened to the mosque?
- What did Anas mean when he told the man who was crying that he felt the same way whenever there was an attack by the Islamic State?
- If you were to describe Anas Bensalah using a word or two, what would they be?