

Bio: Hisham Yasin, Al Salam Mosque Member

Hisham Yasin is a 39-year old Muslim resident of Fort Smith. He grew up poor, but after moving to Arkansas in 1996, he built up a successful used-car business with his brother. He now lives comfortably in a big house on the edge of town with his three children, who have what he calls a “five-star-life.” Hisham was one of the founders of Al Salam Mosque and continues to be a board member.

On October 20, 2016, Hisham rushed to the Al Salam mosque, not for his morning prayers, as he might have done on other mornings, but carrying a gun after having received a distressed phone call from the mosque’s imam (or prayer leader). As Hisham pulled into the mosque’s driveway, he saw a swastika on the mosque’s curbside sign and writing on the building: “Go Home” and “We Don’t Want You Here U.S.A.” And there was more. The vandals had written profanities about Islam and Allah (God) and a phrase in Latin: “Deus Vult,” which he found out later was a rallying cry used during the Crusades meaning, “It is God’s will.”

Hisham was profoundly hurt. These vandals didn’t understand how America was the only home he had ever known. As a Palestinian refugee living in Syria, he had been stateless. America had given him a country. It had given him dignity when he traveled with his American passport to places he’d been banned from before. When they saw his passport, people at the border would stand up straight and say, “Welcome Mr. Hisham!”

At the mosque that October morning, Hisham sprang into action. He called the police. He called the mosque’s board members and he called the media. By early afternoon the story was breaking in the news.

And then something wonderful happened: Churches called. A synagogue called. Buddhists called. So did residents who’d seen the news or simply drove by and saw the vandalism for themselves.

The mosque was inundated with cards and letters. Some even sent flowers. People reached out from as far away as Reston, VA. Hisham was overjoyed.

Discuss the following:

- What are your thoughts and feelings about Hisham’s experiences?
- How do you think Hisham felt about what happened to the mosque?
- How do you think the reaction to the vandalism from churches and others in the community affected Hisham?
- If you were to describe Hisham using a word or two, what would they be?