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An American Child

It was early morning. The sun peeked in through my half-opened blinds, the calm fall breeze seeped in through my window, and the birds chirped, reminding the world to wake up. I had just woken up, minutes before my annoying alarm went off, and I was glad to hit the off button as I rolled off my bed and began to prepare for another day of school. I was in the second grade and life could not have been treating me better. In just a few minutes or so, I would be playing with my friends on the blacktop, running amuck.

I remember going on with my morning as usual: scrubbing my hands down with soap, making sure to get in between my fingers and nails; brushing my teeth, rigorously stroking the brush up, down, left, right, and gargling out the astonishing amount of candy and gunk from the previous night; washing my face. Breakfast was always prepared before I even got to the table. My mom made me the usual peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, without the crust, and a full glass of milk with strawberry Nesquik, mixed in my favorite glass with the straw swirling around and around—my favorite! I turned on the television, getting ready to watch Power Rangers, but instead I clearly remember seeing in bold black and red letters: “BREAKING NEWS.” Terrorists had hijacked and crashed commercial planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, into both towers of the World Trade Center. American Flight 77 had crashed into the Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93 had crashed somewhere in a field.

I vividly remember videos of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers, the buildings incinerating with the jet fuel and collapsing within minutes. I remember individuals jumping off from nearly the top of the towers, their bodies unrecognizable as they hit the ground. I also remember camera men rushing behind the courageous firefighters into the smoke-filled towers, knowing that they would collapse any second. The whole world stood in awe and disbelief at what had just occurred. As I watched, I was unaware that I would be directly affected by this event. It would alter the rest of my life.
An American Child

I remember my Uncle Zahid calling my mom from work, describing the catastrophe that had just unfolded. I was wondering why my mom was on the phone at this hour, especially knowing that we would be running late for school if she continued socializing, but it wasn’t socializing. My uncle was insisting that I stay home from school that day. My mom broke the news that I wasn’t going to school. In a way, I was ecstatic because I wouldn’t have to deal with my grumpy old ogre of a teacher, but I was somewhat saddened by the idea of not seeing my friends and not being able to play basketball. I was infatuated with basketball, with running around, dribbling, and scoring. Instead, I spent the entire day in pajamas watching Power Rangers and Yu-Gi-Oh! I re-enacted the combat sequences and scenes from Power Rangers, and I spent hours watching the new episodes of Yu-Gi-Oh! as I anticipated which trading cards to get next, in order to defeat my opponents.

The next day, I went through the same routine of getting up before the annoying alarm, rushing to the bathroom, washing my hands, brushing my teeth, washing my face, and then on to eating breakfast. When I turned on the television again, the same news channel was covering what had occurred the day before. I flipped through every single channel and almost all consisted of the same exact news feed. Now I was worried. I remember seeing that 7-Elevens, Sikh temples, mosques, and other establishments associated with Muslims or Middle Easterners were being vandalized, and any individual who fit the image of the terrorists was being discriminated against, verbally abused, and even physically assaulted.

I fit every physical description of the terrorists presented on TV. I was filled with remorse, grief, anger, and other mixed emotions, because I knew that I wasn’t in any way like the barbaric and inhumane individuals who had done such horrific acts. However, I would be discriminated against. I would be judged. Because I was born into a particular religion, because I practiced that religion, because I belonged to a specific ethnicity and culture, did not mean I was associated with those individuals. I remember I was angered by the fact that I had been born into this culture. I began hating myself. I was accused and set aside. I remember being called sand nigger, towel head, traitor, back stabber, and other words that I cannot even express. I was broken; I was hurt. What had the world come to?

With time, I moved on. Those hurtful words did not describe who I was as a person. Those barbaric and inhumane people were not me. I’m equally an American and a Muslim, not one above the other. “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” God Bless America!