

Muslim pioneers remember the early years of Islam



Story and Photos By Nathaniel 10X

CHICAGO-These are special men. Fearless and determined, they were born with the ability to withstand hard trials, to travel the rough road. They are the distance runners who strive to endure until the end. These are pioneers, the first believers, some of the early followers of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. May Allah's richest blessings be upon them.

Many who expected instant heaven perished or fell by the way side. But those who understood, those who knew that they had begun a long journey, they persevered and held open the Temple doors for those who would come later. They knew that they would be taken into captivity, they knew that they would have to serve time in the dungeon of hell, but they also knew that better days would come, because Messenger Muhammad told them so. He prepared them well.

TIMES WERE NOT EASY in those days and Muslims were few, and they were not loved by Lost-Found nor white. "Many times when the landlord found out that you were Muslim, you had to get out." Brother Frank X remembers. There were also many other trials and hardships. These were depression years, hostile years. There were many responsibilities, and many posts to command.

The men had to have many talents. Brother Edward Ali, served as Supreme Captain (of Illinois) at one time. He was also a teacher at the University of Islam. Brother Willie Muhammad was Temple Secretary, also investigator. Each brother held many posts, and they all labored hard to build this nation.

There was not always a place to teach Islam and when one was found it was not always comfortable, but these determined brothers and sisters never gave up.

"I remember one time when we didn't have a place to teach, and Sister Ada Hazziez had a place they used for a livery stable - she opened this place up for us, and we went up the alley to her place to have a meeting." said Brother Willie Muhammad.

Brother Edward Ali also remembers those difficult years and how Islam was spread. "Many of us taught on street corners, in parks, in alleys, on playgrounds, or wherever we found a group of Black people, we'd set up shop and take care of business.

"WE WERE TEACHING the same things then as the Messenger is teaching today...ISLAM! In other words he was familiarizing us with Almighty God and His Wisdom. Not only that, but he was trying to show us that God is a living being, not a spook or something that you can't see. He was making us acquainted with a being, a human being as God (God in Person). That was the main topic of the day.

In those glorious, early years, the brothers and sisters were extremely close, their great unity was heralded far and wide.

"Unity in those days was very, very good," Brother Edward Ali states. "The brothers always visited one another's homes, and every brother had a blackboard in his home. We discussed the knowledge, which had been taught to us. The Messenger said that we must study hard, our wisdom.

"But he also gave us the law, and we tried to live by that law." Brother Ali continued. "According to the law of Islam, you want for your what you want for yourself. In other words if I have a loaf of bread, half of that loaf belongs to you."

"If the Messenger came and found you working, the first thing he would say is, 'Brother can I help you here?' and he would unbutton his coat and jump in and help. That's what I call wanting for your brother what you want for yourself - that's what I call unity - you are helping! Two or three or four or five brothers can always do better than one. Well that's what he was teaching!!!

"He would pull his coat off anytime and help you to do a job. He was always willing to do something for you, and he still is today," Brother Ali said.

BROTHER WILLIE MUHAMMAD heard the Teaching in the late Autumn of 1933, in a church on the Westside of Chicago on the corner of Maypole and Damen. Later, after he became a good follower, he states he knew a rough road was ahead.

"I never had the idea that we had an easy job, I was not a great scholar of the Bible, but I did know that Moses was in the wilderness for 40 years," he said comparing the history of Moses to Messenger Muhammad.

I WOULD LISTEN carefully to the Messenger, how he would speak of 40 years - then he would tell us how many ministers he needed to raise the dead - he said he needed one million ministers. All of this told me that this job would take some time," said Brother Willie Muhammad.

"THE MESSENGER also said that our work was right here in America - that we didn't have to go to Africa, that it was here in America - where we could do the most good."

"I remember how the Messenger, under all circumstances, would persevere - and he's the same today, only wiser, but he never varied his teaching."

"I've see the Messenger suffering a severe attack of his sickness (asthma), then within the next hour, he was gone into the streets to carry on his work.

"Things like this always gave me courage to know that no matter what or how I felt - this work must go on." Brother Muhammad added.

Brother Frank X's recollections capture the jubilation and joy and happiness that Master Fard Muhammad showed when he was among the believers.

"He was always happy," Bro. Frank said. He would come in bowing. He would say, "It's been a long time

since I've seen my uncle (so-called Negro). I promised Abraham that I'd come after you. I told Abraham I'd go and gather them myself, I won't send anyone, I'll go myself."

When Brother Frank first heard the teaching in early 1933, these were depression years and times were hard..

"I REMEMBER the first time I came, it was at the Odd Fellows Hall on 33rd and State. I had never seen so many people at one time. There was no room to sit, they were all along the wall and scattered out in the halls. The Messenger taught for about six hours that night. Some got up and went home and came back again, and he was still teaching. It was a big hall; more than 1,500 people were there," Brother Frank said.

It was on a Wednesday in May of 1933 when Brother Edward Ali first heard the Teaching.

"HE (THE Messenger) had four brothers from Detroit. They had their fez on - what we call the universe. He was demonstrating the fez, he had one and the four brothers had one.

"The people wanted to know about the fez, why the fez was red. He told them why, why it was red - well that's the fire..fire being red, naturally the fez was red.

"It sounded real good." Brother Ali states.

"What impresses me most and makes me want to live a long, long time, is the progress that the Nation of Islam is making. We never had any restaurants to eat in in the early days. If you didn't have a house of your own, we had to eat at some brother's home.

"I never will forget, there was one sister (she's dead now) Sister Pauline Bahar, she always would fix dinner for the Fruit (F.O.I.). She would always prepare something good for the men in Islam."

There are many memories, many secrets, much hardship and much joy in the history of the early believers in Islam. There is still much, that, despite how long ago it happened is still highly controversial and delicate. The battle at 11th and State streets, the years of captivity, and much, much more that Muhammad Speaks will endeavor to bring to its readers in the future.

There are many brothers and sisters who were not mentioned, but we will be seeing them, and we will bring their words to you, our readers. But it is their story, these gallant men and courageous women who struggled and persevered, survived and brought about change in the Name of Allah and His True Divine Apostle the Hon. Elijah Muhammad.



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