

“CHILDHOOD FRIENDSHIPS”

FOR LESSON

*Listening as
a Creative Act***NARRATOR** **Mohammad Razvi**

RAZVI Oh. So schools was good. I really loved Sheepshead Bay. Junior high school also. That’s actually IS 14. And PS 194 was my elementary school. So IS 14 really gave me a little bit more changes in my — how could I say? — my perspective — IS 14 gave me changes which I viewed for myself in different ways, because that’s where I started to sometimes call myself Mo, not Mohammad. It was like a cool thing, all right, you know what? Call me Mohammad, or Mo, it doesn’t matter. But Mo just like, fell in.

And it was like, just a — I was more, more American in IS 14 than I was in my elementary school. And that’s where I started playing handball. And I loved the sport, and you know, I just continued all the way into high school, and then I joined the handball team, which I really liked a lot. And, but I learned. I learned of things, other things. When I say other things, I mean, you know, how to interact with others, more importantly, because I had my friends. One of my Russian friends was Alex. And he’s still, we’re still friends. Another African American friend, his name is Clayton. We’re still friends. We’re still, you know, here and there we talk to each other. I actually brought my friends to meet with [NYPD] Commissioner [Raymond] Kelly, I remember. I actually have that picture in my office somewhere. I’m going to find that. But that’s what I did. I mean, I continued with some of these friends and, you know, because of what relationships we had, what I learned, that’s what I did.

STRONG Talk to me about the Mo transition a little bit. What do you mean by more American? And —

RUN TIME **5:47**

RAZVI So, when I was in, at that moment, when I was in — I think it was my math teacher, I was in a math class or something, and, you know, the teacher said, “Mohammad Razvi,” and they said, “Oh, how about ‘Mo’?” And I said, “Yeah, that’s fine.” To me, it didn’t make a difference, but then everyone started calling me Mo at that junior high school. And you know, whoever my friends were, they knew me as Mo. It was okay. To me, I didn’t see any difference. However, it just was like, you know, just like a nickname, from William to Bill, or from Michael to Mike.

STRONG Elizabeth to Liz.

RAZVI Elizabeth to Liz. There you go.

STRONG So it — you know, my experience of nicknames is that it came with sort of a social shift, or an identity experiment, which is why I ask about it. Also because you said something about being more American than you had previously.

RAZVI Yes.

STRONG So tell me what does that mean in your mind, what more American is?

RAZVI So when I, more American, the way I’m looking at it, is because I had more grasp of the language. Because in elementary, I was still picking up. I was still, you know, catching up. So when I was in junior high, I was like, in it. I had everything; I was good. You know, I knew, and I was able to articulate my arguments, or articulate my conversations, you know, perfectly. But in elementary, you know, I mean that was a little bit of a difficult time for me.

STRONG Got it. Another thing you mentioned that stood out to me is learning to deal with difference. People who were different from you. Can you give me an example of a specific story where — ?

RAZVI Oh, Howie Goldman. So Howie Goldman invites me to his bar mitzvah. And I take the invitation card, and I show it to my mom. I said, “Mom, you know, this friend of mine, he’s, you know, invited me,” and she sees that it’s a bar mitzvah, it’s a Jewish community member, and she says, “Are you sure you want to go there?” I’m like, “Yeah, he’s my friend, he’s my friend.” Mom was like, you know, thinking and thinking. She goes, “Okay, go.” And then when I talked to Howie, I said, “You know, my mom was like, kind of like peculiar, why, you know, I would want to go to a Jewish bar mitzvah.” And I told her, you know, it’s my friend. And he goes, “Mo, you know what? Similarly when I was writing out, when I told my dad your name, Mohammad Razvi, to write an invitation card to my friend Mohammad, he asked me the same thing, ‘You sure he wants to come? You sure he’s going to come?’” And I didn’t know back then there was — you know, to me, he’s my friend.

So that story stuck with me, and when I went to the bar mitzvah, it was so awesome that, you know, I was like, “Oh my God, look at this, you know, he’s becoming a” — how could I say — “a teen.” And you know, the way they celebrated it and everything. It was in a ballroom, out in — by Avenue U. A huge ballroom, and it was just amazing. I thought it was wonderful. I told my mom, “That’s great what they did. It was awesome. And like a birthday party.”

But that stuck with me, only because when I became an adult, and I started building these relationships between the Jewish and Muslim community, then I start to realize, I’m like, “Oh my God, there’s so much dynamics that has to put in place,” and that’s why my mom was asking me, that’s why his dad was asking him, “Is he really going to come? Does he really want to come?” And do I really want to go? And I never thought of it until, you know, when I started doing this community service work.

BIO Mohammad Razvi was born in 1971 in Pakistan. He and his family immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s, where they settled in Sheepshead Bay. He started several businesses in Midwood, and founded the Council of Peoples Organization (COPO) after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Through COPO, engagement with law enforcement agencies, and participation in research regarding hate crimes, Razvi worked to provide support to Muslim and immigrant communities.

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