

“MUSLIM POLICE OFFICER ON 9/11”

NARRATOR Ahmed Nasser**FOR LESSON***After 9/11:
The Political
Is Personal*

NASSER So being a police officer actually gave me an exposure to the community and made my connection with the community even better. Because they were — they felt — you know, there’s, you know, a comfort to talk to me and — and kind of reach out to me if they need help. And in fact, some of them’ll call me for every little thing, and I’d say, “Hey, listen, you got to call 911, not me!” [laughter] But, you know, they did. So after the sad event of 9/11 I became more attached to the community because I felt there was a need to really connect with the community even more. A lot of the community members who — like myself, immigrants — came here, they were afraid, you know, “What’s going to happen to us now?” Because what happened was 11— was not easy for all of us.

I remember the day of 9/11 — going to take you a little back there. I was — you know, it was on my regular day off. And I just took my kids to school and came home, sat down, having my coffee. And I see the news. And immediately I called my precinct and I — I told them, “What did happen here?” They said, “Oh, must be an accident.” I said, “It can’t be an accident. This is something more. Do you want me to come in?” They said, “Nah, we’ll call you.” I didn’t wait for them to call me. I just responded, and I actually responded on my own, then eventually made my way to the precinct and started from probably nine o’clock till the next day, nine o’clock in the morning. You know, 24 hours. And that was the toughest day in my life, to be honest with you. And my wife was calling me. I wasn’t answering. And I was afraid, “What’s going to happen to them?” And was too many emotions, too many things, and, you know, didn’t know what to expect. One thing I was certain that, you know what, I’m a police officer, and I have to be there for my community. And when I say “my community,” all of New

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York City community. So I stayed until the next day and then I was able to speak to my wife. I told her, “Listen, I’m fine, everything is good. I’ll see you later.”

And then everything took a different turn from that point on. There was a lot of fear in the community. People that I knew called and say, “What’s going to happen, and what we should do?” And so I told them, “What you should do is you should just, live your life and do everything like you should be doing. If you see something that you don’t think is right, you make sure you call the police. If there’s anything that you need, you make sure you call the local precinct.” And I gave ’em the phone numbers for the local precinct. I gave them my phone number. And we moved on.

And we — as officers, Muslim officers — we started looking around. You know, who’s — who else is there that’s going to, you know, get the community to kind of, feel a little more comfort? Because obviously there was a lot of things that was happening, and a lot of the communities were leaving the country, moving to Canada, moving to that — you know, a lot of people may not be talking much and what have you. So there was a lot of fear in the community. And we figured, you know what, we got to reach out to them to assure them that the police department is not going to chase everybody. We’re not chasing anyone. We got to make sure that you’re okay. And if they see something that is affecting them or affecting anybody in the — you know, in the city they should call 911. And we should be working as partners, as a community together. Because that was, that’s just — that’s what we need to do.

So myself and five others — police officers and a correction officer — came together, and we decided that we wanted to do a forum for the community to kind of educate them about law enforcement, because for the community if you’re a police officer, you are the immigration officer; you are the one who’s

going to deport them; you are the judge and jury. That's — that's how they look at it. And we had to really explain to them like, “No, there's a difference. As police officers, it is our duty to protect you. We're here to serve you and to protect you; we're here to make sure — we're not asking you about immigration issues. That's not our problem. That's not — we're not worrying about that. We worry about the community's safety, and we want you to be with us, and we are with you.” So we did a forum, I remember that — I don't remember the exact date, but we did a forum in the school for the community, the Al-Noor Islamic School. It's on Fourth Avenue. Where we invited the community, we invited different city agencies as well as federal agencies, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], ICE [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement], etc., because we want them to feel comfortable. We wanted to come and sit down and ask questions.

So that went well, and we decided to start a Muslim officers' association. We called it the American Muslim Law Enforcement Officers Association, which include police officers, corrections, and any other law enforcement. And the idea was to kind of like, “You know what? We need to make the community feel comfortable that they have representation within the law enforcement.” 'Cause, you know, it has a great impact on the community. Not too long after that, I think, a lot of people joined us. A lot of young people who were at the fences to join the police department became police officers. And it took — you know, it took a lot for us to kind of come out to the community and tell 'em, “Listen. You need to be part of this. You need to — you want — you want to make a change? Stop complaining and be part of something.” And a lot of these young people, you know, they respond to the call. And when I think about it now, it really took a lot. And the result of it now, we have over a thousand Muslim officers within the NYPD alone, not to mention corrections, FBI, and all the other city — you know,

all the other law enforcement agencies. And that's — it took dedication from — and not just to take the credit, you know, the five officers, but it took a lot of dedication from those five officers and then everybody else who followed through to kind of make that happen and make the community feel more comfortable.

BIO Ahmed Nasser was born in 1966 in the village of Almayanah in Yemen. He immigrated to the United States in 1986 and settled in Brooklyn Heights. He worked in family-owned restaurants and earned undergraduate degrees from New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn and Baruch College in Manhattan before joining the New York City Police Department in 2000. As a detective and member of the Community Affairs Bureau, Nasser worked to improve communication between Muslim immigrant communities and the NYPD in the years following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. He cofounded the American Muslim Law Enforcement Officers Association in 2001 and the NYPD Muslim Officers Society in 2004.

CITATION Nasser, Ahmed, Oral history interview conducted by Liz H. Strong, September 18, 2018, Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.40; Brooklyn Historical Society.