

Rais Bhuiyan

December 12, 2022

Moureen Kaki [00:00:03] Okay, today is December 12th at 123 Central Time. My name is Moureen Kaki. I'm an oral historian fellow with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life, and I'm here with Mr. Rais Bhuiyan. Rais, thank you so much for joining us today. Would you mind just introducing yourself and telling us where you're calling in from today, please?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:00:25] Thank you, Moureen. My name is Rais Bhuiyan. I'm the founder of World Without Hate and a survivor of post-9/11 hate crime, and I'm based in Seattle, Washington state.

Moureen Kaki [00:00:38] Thank you so much again for being with us here today. Rais, I appreciate you sharing your story with us, and I want to go back a little bit and ask you from the beginning, can you talk a little bit about what your childhood was like?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:00:54] My childhood. Well, I was born in an upper-middle class, devout Muslim family in Bangladesh. And growing up, I witnessed the plight of poor, needy, and deprived people in Bangladesh, and I always asked myself that, as a child, seeing the plight of poor people, why there was so much difference in society among people. Why some people have so much and others have nothing, and they struggled every single day to survive, to live like a human being. And though we were much more fortunate than those people, but as a child, their plight, their suffering deeply touched me. And I always wanted to do something to help people.

[00:01:47] And I remember one day, my mother caught me red-handed while giving away one of our outfits to a poor woman, came begging at our door. And when she asked me what I was doing, I confessed that it was not the first time I had given away her outfit. And she had been wondering why her closet was thinning. And she hugged me. She was very proud of my giving spirit, my kindness at a very young age, but then she urged me to enjoy growing up. And childhood was very - good childhood. I have five brothers and three sisters. I'm number seven. And growing up in a big family, in a joined family, I learned a lot of things. You have to share with your other siblings. You have to maintain chain of command. You have to be sacrificing. You have to be tolerant. You have to be giving. So there are a lot of good things I learned growing up in a big family. And also I enjoyed playing soccer with my little friends outside. And my father served as an engineer for Bangladesh government. Later on, he was transferred to Abu Dhabi to build their telephone infrastructure back in the late '70s, '80s, and early '90s. And my mother was a homemaker.

Moureen Kaki [00:03:32] Thank you so much for sharing that. It sounds like you had a joyful childhood, and that your kindness started that at early age to turn you into who you are. What a lovely way to share, thank you. And Rais, when did you find yourself in the States? How did that happen?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:03:52] Well, I left home at the age of twelve to attend one of the best military boarding schools in the country. And I spent six years in the military boarding school, and later on, I joined the Bangladeshi Air Force to fulfill my childhood dream to be an Air Force pilot. But after graduating as a pilot officer from the Bangladeshi Air Force, I did not feel my destiny was there. So when I got a chance to come to the US, I took it. After graduating high school from the military boarding school, I also wanted to come to America for additional higher education. But then after joining the Bangladeshi Air Force, I

realized that that dream would never come true if I stayed in the military for the rest of my life. And plus, also, as I said, that I didn't feel my destiny was in the military, and had a dream to come to America for higher education.

[00:04:58] So I asked for release. And, to my surprise, I was extremely lucky that I was let go without any kind of penalty. And I was extremely lucky that the Bangladeshi Air Force let me go. And I began to prepare myself to apply for a visa and come to America. And it was not an easy journey, I was going back and forth to the US Embassy applying for a student visa, but my request was rejected time and again. And I remember my mother kept telling me that, "They would not give you the visa, so you better do something else instead of applying again and again. I see your sad face every time you go to the US Embassy and come back. And it's humiliating, and I don't want to go through that." And I told my mother that, "You taught me not to give up, and now you're telling me to give up?" And she said, "But I see your sad face. I see you, the pain you've been going through, and it breaks my heart. I don't want you to go through that anymore."

[00:06:09] But I did not listen. I kept trying, and finally I was successful. On my seventh try I got the US visa and left my home, my family, for New York City. And it was a beautiful journey. I remember when I left my country, came to New York City, there was a cultural shock. New culture, new people, everything was new to me. So after I landed in New York City, I felt the cultural shock, people, new people, new language, new community. But I told myself that there's a lot to see, process, and learn. I need to keep my eyes and ears open and keep my mouth shut, so that I can learn and grow.

Moureen Kaki [00:07:21] That's persistence, right there. And could you talk more about the culture shock that hit in New York City? Do you have a particular experience or memory that you can describe related to that?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:07:34] It was cultural shock in a sense that there are a lot of local terms that I was not aware of. Back home in Bangladesh, we follow British English standard, and it's American English. It's a little different in terms of the way this is spoken, and also some of the terms are probably pronounced differently, and also some of the local terms. For example, when I heard in my classroom kids are saying, "Hey, what's up?" I was kind of confused. Why they're saying to each other, "What is up?" There is nothing up. There is a ceiling in the classroom or if you walk on the outside, you see nothing but sky. But why they kept telling each other, "Hey, what's up?" I was confused at the beginning. I kept looking up as if I was missing something. And then I could not keep my curiosity anymore in check, so finally I asked one of my classmates that, "I'm sorry to ask you, but you guys keep asking each other, 'What's up? What's up?' But what is up?" Says, "Oh, this is just a term, instead of saying 'hi' and 'hello,' we just use this term." So I said, "Okay." So I learned something new that day.

[00:09:02] And also pretty hot summer. They're saying, "It's cool. It's cool." I said, "Well, it's not cool. It's hot outside. Why they kept saying it's cool? It is not cool. It's hot." So these are some of the local terms I did not understand at the beginning, so it took a little time for me to learn. And also needed to learn how I need to pursue myself in public. You need to stand in a line. It's not that if you're someone famous, if you're someone people know you, or you're son of XYZ, you get ahead of the line. Here, you stand in line, and you follow rules and regulation. Once you drive, there are a lot of lanes. You follow the lanes. Not like back home, that you find a space, you just poke your nose in, and you start driving.

[00:09:59] So there are a lot of things like that, was totally new to me. And I realized that people follow and obey law here. Is not like in many countries where we visited, and also like my birth country, that there are laws, but in many places, people literally don't follow the laws. They do not obey the law. Breaking the law is a normal thing. But after I came to America, I realized that people actually obey the law, and they try their best to follow. And I told myself, "Well, now I cannot think in a different way. I have to follow the local laws and regulations." Which, I loved it, of course. So these are some of the cultural, new cultural norms, language barrier, people was different, and have to find ways to make friends in my adopted country.

Moureen Kaki [00:11:00] Thank you so much for sharing that Rais. It's funny, because some of the things that you described about the way the rule of law here is just a little bit more accepted socially and just followed directly without [inaudible] is something I noticed in my experience. I was fortunate enough to travel to Brazil and Palestine when I was young, and so I saw those similar things and was shocked by them in reverse, in different ways. So I totally understand what you mean, in that sense, and I appreciate you sharing that little tidbit. And so this is all in New York, and eventually, you made your way down to Texas. So how did that journey happen from New York to Texas as you came to your adopted country?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:11:46] That's a very interesting question, because growing up, watching wild, wild west movies, I could not resist a friend's invitation to visit Dallas, Texas. And excited to see the ranches, cowboys, bars with their famous swinging doors, though I never did find one. So I remember in 2000, I visited Texas, and I loved it. Long highways, big house, warm weather like back home. I felt like back home. I felt homely. And I visited a couple of times, and every time I visited, I felt that I really liked Dallas, Texas, and my friend told me that if you move to Dallas, we would be happy to have you as a working partner in our gas station business. You can work with us. You can go to school. Tuition fee was much cheaper than New York City, and I felt, "Well, that sounds like a very good offer. I can save money on tuition fees. At the same time, I can also work with my friend in their gas station as a working partner." I loved it. And so I moved to Dallas, Texas, right before September 11, 2001.

Moureen Kaki [00:13:26] Wow, okay. Wow, what a way to get down there. And before I ask you about events related to September 11, I just want to ask you, what did you continue to study? Because you'd received an education in Bangladesh, so were you pursuing post-secondary education?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:13:46] Well, I had my bachelor's in aeronautics from the National University in Bangladesh, and I wanted to study computer science. So when I was in New York, I started studying Microsoft System Engineering, and I wanted to pursue a degree in computer science. So when I moved to Dallas, I was preparing myself to get into university and get another degree in computer science. And at the same time, my - I had a fiancée back home, and she had been waiting for me. So I promised her that I would go back, or at least if we get a chance to bring her here, to give her an American experience, and then we will decide what we would do, whether we stay here, or we go back.

Moureen Kaki [00:14:37] Okay, good for you. And unfortunately, because I'm familiar with your story, I know that following your move to Texas, that that decision to study was interrupted. [barking] I'm so sorry.

Rais Bhuiyan [00:14:54] No worries.

Moureen Kaki [00:14:56] Sorry, my dog.

Rais Bhuiyan [00:14:56] He's saying hello to me.

Moureen Kaki [00:14:58] Yes, yes, he's getting excited. But yes, sorry about that. But yeah, like I said, unfortunately, because I am familiar with the story, I know that those studies were interrupted. And this is, of course, one of the main reasons we wanted to ask you to share your story with us today. But Rais, would you mind telling us what happened, your experience on 9/11, please?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:15:24] Sure. September, I remember September 11, 2001 happened to be my day off. Every Tuesday, I could sleep a little longer. And I remember as I began making breakfast, I turned on the TV and saw the news. One of the Twin Towers got hit by a plane. My first reaction was, "This must be a trailer of an upcoming Hollywood movie." But then when I saw the second tower get hit, my initial thoughts vanished, and I clearly realize something terrible was happening in New York City, my first home in my adopted country. And like everyone, I was in shock, horrified, and quickly paralyzed by the fear of unknown. And I was sad. I was also angry, seeing what was happening.

[00:16:38] But I didn't know how to express my anger or my sadness, because I was afraid for myself as well, as once I came to know that these terrorist attacks were carried out by a group of foreigners, a group of misguided people, and who looked like Middle Eastern descent people. And as a person of color, I was afraid. But at the same time, I tried to comfort myself saying that, "But I didn't do it, and I have nothing to do with that. Yes, those are foreigners. I'm a foreigner in this country, but I have nothing to do with the terrorist attacks, so I should not be scared that something terrible might happen to me."

[00:17:35] And I told my friend, the owner of the gas station, about my concern, because immediately after 9/11, everything changed. Traditionally friendly customers became angry. They looked at me as if I was guilty, and I no longer felt safe. And it did not take longer to realize my life in America would never be the same. So when I shared my fear, my concern with the owner, my friend, he told me to just lay low. Do not get into any kind of argument with any of the customers. If they say anything nasty, just ignore, because you did not do anything wrong. And people are angry everywhere. Just ignore and do not get into any kind of argument.

[00:18:33] But when I realized that, I was facing more and more challenging situation. Customers came angry at me. I tried to understand their anger, because I understood at the time that their country was under attack, and they had the right to be angry. But I was angry too. But I didn't know what could I do to express my anger. So it was doubled down on me, because I was afraid. I was angry because of 9/11, and at the same time, I was afraid of backlash. So these 9/11 terrorist attacks caused double trauma for people like me, first seeing the horror, and then from the fear of facing any kind of backlash.

[00:19:34] I remember one day a customer asked me to open the pump without paying up front. And I politely told him that, "Sir, the policy of this station is you have to pay upfront." And he said, "No, I want you to open it now." And I said, "I'm sorry, I cannot do that, because my owner told me not to do that." So he came back, and he said, "What is the cost of this glass window?" And I felt threat right away, why he told me, "How much it costs?" And immediately, he said, "How much is your life cost?" And I could not believe what I heard that just because of I didn't open the pump, he posed a life threat.

[00:20:28] And I told my owner that I really cannot work in this place anymore, because I feel like something terrible is going to happen. But then he kept insisting me that, "Well, do not worry. Nothing bad is gonna happen to you, just lay low." And at the same time, even though I thought of leaving this place, but I felt for my friend, and I realized that if I quit, he'll be in trouble, because now he needs to find more resource to work for his business. And he says, he just opened this business maybe a couple of months ago. It would cost him more money, and also it would put him in a challenging situation. So I deeply thought about him, and then decided not to quit.

[00:21:17] And then that terrible thing happened to me ten days after 9/11 terrorist attacks, as rescuers continued to search ground zero for signs of life. Our country in deep mourning, a newfound fear and uncertainty looming, I began what would be my last day of work as a store clerk in southeast Dallas. And around noon, a man wearing a bandana, sunglasses baseball cap, carrying a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun walked in. Pointing the gun directly at my face, he asked, "Where are you from?" From a previous robbery experience, I thought it would be a robbery. So as soon as you walked in, I placed all the money on the counter. And I begged him not to shoot. And when he asked me, "Where are you from?" I realized he was not here for money. He was there for me. I begged him, and despite my pleading, he pulled the trigger from point blank range.

[00:22:51] I felt it first like a million bees were stinging my face, and then I heard it, the explosion. I looked down and saw blood was pouring like an open faucet from the right side of my head. And frantically and instinctively, I placed both hands on my face thinking I had to keep my brain from spilling out. And I remember screaming, "Mom," on top of my voice. And then looked left, saw the gunman was still standing, and I thought if I did not appear to be dying, he would shoot me again. My military instinct kicked in right there, and I fell to the floor on my own pool of blood, and he finally left.

[00:23:51] I stood up, grabbed the phone to call 911. But I was shaking so badly, I could not call 911, and I was afraid to go outside, thinking the shooter might be on the parking lot. And if he sees me there, he would shoot me again. But then I told myself that, "I'm dying anyway. If I stay inside, I'll die. If I go outside, he might shoot me again. I'd rather go outside. I will take the chance." So I ran to the barbershop next door, and the three men inside looked at me in horror, thinking the gunman was right behind me. They tried to run away. They tried to run away to the emergency exit door. And I could grab one of them and begged him to call 911. And as he did, I caught myself on the mirror. And the image reflected back was gruesome, like something straight out of a horror movie. And I couldn't believe that it was my face.

[00:25:10] Instead of lying on the floor and waiting for ambulance to arrive, I came out, and I was running in the parking lot from one side to the other and looking for ambulance. And I was lucky, within few minutes, ambulance arrived, and as soon as I saw the ambulance, I started running towards it, taking off my shirt and shoes off. And on my way to the hospital, I realized I felt that my eyes were closing, and I could not think clearly. And at that moment, images of my mother, my father, siblings, and my fiancé appeared before my eyes, and then a graveyard. I begged God not to take me. I begged God to give me a second chance, and I promised God that, "If you let me live, I would do good things with my life. I would help others."

Moureen Kaki [00:26:28] Wow. Excuse me, I'm sorry. Wow Rais. Even knowing about your story beforehand, but hearing you tell this is - I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that that

happened to you. What an incredibly difficult trauma. What's the next thing that you remember happening?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:27:31] Well, the next thing I remember - let me take a step back. I was taken into a hospital, and I remember after several hours, I was taken into the hospital. I was put on life support, and the next thing I remember, I was asking, "Where am I?" thinking I had died. I anxiously waited, and those few moments, still I remember, were extremely powerful and also sad, that not knowing if I actually died, or I was still alive. And those moments seemed like days and months, those few moments. And then when I heard, "Good morning Mr. Bhuiyan, you are in the hospital," it was one of the most beautiful moments of my life. My eyes were full of tears, not from the pain, but from the joy of still being alive. And it reminded me at that moment that it's simply beautiful just to live, no matter where you are, no matter you are in the hospital, you are on the street, you are in prison. But you are still alive.

[00:29:38] And this is the most beautiful thing: that you are still alive. You can see your loved ones. You can go and hug them. You can talk to them. You can play with your friends. You can play with your siblings. There are many things you can do, because you are still alive. And I felt at that moment that life is precious. But the joy didn't last long. The hospital, which was private and expensive, and I did not have health insurance at that time, discharged me and told me to arrange follow up medical treatments on my own. The first part of my American dream was shattered after I was shot, and the second part just began after I was kicked out of the hospital.

Moureen Kaki [00:30:59] What do you mean by that Rais, your second part?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:31:03] Because when I was discharged from the hospital, I did not have enough money in my pocket to go and seek medical help, and I had no health insurance at the time. I needed immediate surgeries. I needed immediate treatment, and the trauma, the pain from the wounds, it caused a nightmare for me not knowing how my life would unfold. Would I be able to survive? Would I be able to lead a normal life again? Somebody tried to kill me because of my skin color, because of my race and perceived faith. Am I safe in this country anymore? And now I needed medical treatment, and the hospital just discharged me. So I felt like a wounded soldier in a foreign land. I felt like castaway. I felt like an orphan child that nobody was interested to take care of. It took almost two weeks to get medical attention, and that two weeks was extremely traumatic, painful, and sad, because I felt like not a second-class, but a third-class citizen at that moment. And after I was discharged from the hospital, I was going through emotional roller coaster. I was going through a lot of ups and downs mentally, financially, physically, and spiritually.

Moureen Kaki [00:33:16] Of course, of course. I mean, I don't think anybody could go through a situation like that without being in crisis in all of those places. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that this was such a horrible event to have happened to you. What an awful, awful thing to experience.

Rais Bhuiyan [00:33:38] And not only that, when I was in the hospital, someone called my parents back home and told them that, "Pray for your son. He is in hospital in critical condition." And then there was no follow up. The next couple of days, it was a disaster back home, since they didn't receive any more phone calls, so they thought that I was no longer there. And it took almost four days for me to finally call my parents back home. And when I first called them, we could not talk for several moments, because they thought I was no longer there. And I didn't know that somebody called and told my parents about my

situation, and there was no follow ups. And when my father heard what happened to me, he suffered a stroke, but thankfully, he survived.

[00:34:53] So it was on and on and on, after this incident happened to me. It did not end there. The bad incidents did not stop right there. It continued. And that's why I say that the second part of my American nightmare began when I was discharged from the hospital. But it also gave me a perspective, if I may say that, what it feels like to be living in a house, in a food insecure house, what it feels like to live without medical attention. Millions of people right here in our country and all over the world live in that kind of situation. Food insecure house, no medical support, full of anxiety, where the next meal would come from.

[00:35:53] This shooting incident actually put me through those situations one after another one. There were times when I had to call the doctor's office for sample medication, because I couldn't afford to buy those expensive eye drops or other antibiotics or other medications. I had no money in my pocket many times. I depended on friends and people I knew at that time, on their support. So it gave me a different perspective, what it feels like to live with nothing. And it helped me to understand more about people. Those who go through this kind of situation on a regular basis, especially the people in my childhood, who I tried to help.

[00:36:56] I never knew what it feels like to be on the receiving end of mercy and kindness, because I was never in their situation. I know what it feels like to give, but I never knew what it feels like to live on others' mercy and generosity and kindness. But the shooting incident gave me that perspective. The shooting incident helped me to realize what it feels like to live with nothing. And so I believe God chose me to go through this pain and suffering to help me be a better human being, to help me to understand what people go through when they live in a food insecure house, or with very little to nothing, which I never had experienced in my entire life.

Moureen Kaki [00:38:13] I can't imagine what that must have been like. That's something no one should ever have to go through, much less after the violence that it took the cause that incident in those circumstances. I'm so sorry. And could you remind us, Rais, how old were you around this time?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:38:36] When the shooting incident happened, I was around twenty-six years old.

Moureen Kaki [00:38:42] And once your family was informed, were you able to be surrounded by family at all, or were you still alone in your personal circumstance as well?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:38:53] No, I was alone in my dream country. America was and is still my dream country. I had no loved ones, no family members in the US. So after the shooting incident happened to me, it helped me to be stronger as well. I mean, you would expect to have loved ones around you when you are going through surgeries. When you are done with your surgery, you would expect your loved ones would be near you. You would expect your mother or your spouse or your family members would bring hot food. The food brings comfort to you. But in my case, there was none. There was no one standing beside my bed with a glass of water or with a cup of warm soup or anything. There was no one holding my hand and telling me, "Things will be okay." There was no one.

[00:40:14] Especially because of the shooting incident, I went through several eye surgeries. Unfortunately though, I lost vision in one eye. My face was and remains

peppered with more than three dozen shotgun pellets. I lost my home, my sense of security, and my fiancé, but gained more than \$60,000 in medical bills. The friend I was staying with, who was the owner of the gas station, told me to move into a nursing home. So I went through challenges after challenges. I went through difficulty after difficulty. But I did not give up. And I reached out to the Red Cross for help. After several weeks of back-and-forth conversation, they finally told me I was qualified for only one week's of groceries.

Moureen Kaki [00:41:24] Wow.

Rais Bhuiyan [00:41:31] But I survived, I did not give up. I always believed that God gave me a chance for a reason. My attacker killed two other human beings, two other innocent men, one from India, Vasudev Patel, and the other person was Waqar Hassan from Pakistan. And God gave me a second chance. And he could have taken me that day, being shot from point blank range with a double barrel shotgun. My life could have ended there on the day. But I feel like God kept me alive for a reason. God gave me a second chance for a reason, even though it was painful, it was extremely traumatic to go through all these situations, one after another one. Except my life, I lost everything. But I did not lose my hope, my dreams, and my faith.

[00:42:46] And when Red Cross told me that I was qualified for only one weeks of grocery, I thanked them, and I told them that somebody might need that who might be in [a more] dire situation than mine. So I respectfully did not take their one week's worth of groceries, and I told myself that I must not give up. I must move forward and rebuild my life in this country and keep my promise, finding ways to help others, because I learned from my experience what it feels like to be hated, what it feels like to be treated as a lesser person, what it feels like to remain hungry, what it feels like to go through surgeries knowing there'll be no one standing beside you. There'll be no kind shoulder to lean on. There'll be no comfort. You have to make yourself comfortable. You have the power, you have the capacity, and you can do it. We all can do it. We have those capacities, we have the power. Sometimes we do not see it, but this is something God gave to all of us, and I truly believed in that, and I did not give up.

Moureen Kaki [00:44:47] Such determination to live, such will to live. It's incredibly powerful. Earlier Rais, you said that despite that this had happened to you here, America remained your dream country. I'm sure that would confuse some people listening to this. You move here to this country, and then shortly after, you're very violently targeted in a hate crime. And yet, you say that this is still a dream country for you, despite the subsequent experiences of the lack of structural healthcare and support from community. How? How and why? Can you explain?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:45:43] Well, after this incident happened to me, my attacker, after his arrest, he told the news media that what he did, most Americans wanted to do, they just didn't have the guts. He claimed he was a true American, he was a patriot, and he blamed me and my kind for 9/11. And it was tempting, of course, to blame all Americans, all Whites, all Christians, because of my attacker's statement. But by doing so, I would repeat the same mistake that he committed, and because of which, we both paid a big price. Of course, it was tempting to blame everyone for one person's action. But in reality, what happened: a lot of kind and caring Americans came forward to help me.

[00:47:01] For example, a Christian doctor performed eye surgeries, one after another, before receiving insurance he would be paid. An Air Force veteran gave me his extra car

when he came to know about me and my situation. And he said, "I have extra car sitting in my garage. If you want, please come and take the key." I was blown away by his generosity, that he was giving me his extra car. A Muslim man from the local mosque gave me a scholarship to attend school, and because of that education, I was able to get a good IT job. It took little time, of course, but in the end, because of that education, I was able to quit my restaurant job working as a server and move into IT, which was my ultimate goal for coming to America: get into IT, learn more about computer science, start a new career.

[00:48:09] This is America. This is the America - warm, generous, hospitable, welcoming - that I heard so much about growing up. Without the help of all those loving and kind, caring Americans, it would be hard to rebuild my life in the same country, the same place where it was tore apart. Yes, America is not perfect. No country is perfect. But there is a system here. It runs. The system may not be perfect, but it is our responsibility. It is our duty to improve it, to find ways to work together to make it better, to take it where we want it to be. There's a system that runs in this country, and after what happened to me, it would be impossible to rebuild my life the way I did by the mercy of God in any other country.

[00:49:19] American Dream works, works for people who want to take and utilize the tools available in this country. My attacker, born and raised in this country, generation-wise, he failed to take the tools, the opportunity that this country provides to everyone. And I'm not saying to blame him, but for many reasons, he could not take advantage of the tools [that] are available. And there are many reasons behind that. In my situation, in my case, at least I was able to utilize the tools that this country provides.

[00:50:03] I went back to school. I started working as a waiter in a restaurant, even though I was making only \$2.13 per hour working in the restaurant. But I had to learn how to wait table. I needed to improve my speaking skill. I needed to improve my serving skill. As a matter of fact, even though as a Muslim, I never drank alcohol, and I don't still, but I served alcohol in the restaurant to survive. And even though I had no knowledge about alcohols, but many times I became the highest seller in that restaurant because I wanted to survive. I wanted to rebuild my life. And it was possible because of the tools available in our society, in our country. And that's why I tell that America is still the dream country, because there is a system. There are a lot of good people in this country.

[00:51:11] I mean, I have visited almost forty-six states in America, and I have come across so much generosity, empathy, understanding, compassion in every place I visited. We may not hear much about those in our news media or other places, but Americans are one of the most generous and kind people on the face of this earth. And I have experienced that. Yes, one person tried to kill me, who killed two others. That person does not represent Americans. It's just one individual incident. Just as those 9/11 hijackers, those 9/11 terrorist attackers do not represent 1.6 billion Muslims. They do not represent my faith, they do not represent me. Those are misguided people who committed heinous crime out of their hate, but they do not represent Islam or 1.6 billion Muslims.

Moureen Kaki [00:52:42] Absolutely, absolutely. I'm glad that you were able to find the sense of community that offered you support in different ways. It's beautiful to see that people do come together like that. Rais, how did your story become captivated? Was there media attention around it sooner after it happened, or it was after some time? What was that time period like? So you talked about the different experiences you had with people and the journey of food insecurity, houselessness, and just needing to find ways to survive, and using will and determination to get there. But what was the timeline like for you in

terms of developing a sense of processing this, and how did your story become more known?

Rais Bhuiyan [00:53:50] Well unfortunately, my story and the stories of two other victims of my attacker did not any kind of attention immediately after the incidents happened. It was just local news. But the story got more attention after I forgave my attacker in public and launched a campaign to try to save his life from Texas death row. And if I may take a step back, my attacker Mark Stroman was given death penalty. And even though I forgave my attacker after I got my life back, I never felt it was enough. And in 2009, when I went to Mecca for pilgrimage along with my mother, I truly began reflecting upon my shooting incident, and my attacker sitting on death row. And I remembered my promise to God, that if I get a chance to live, I would help others.

[00:55:19] Though I had forgiven my attacker many years ago, in Mecca, I realized that it was not enough. Yes, I forgave him. It makes me feel good. But what is the true outcome of this forgiveness? It's just a feeling in my heart, that I forgave my attacker, and I was able to move forward. But there is no tangible benefit. There is no true outcome of this. Still, he was going to be executed. I began to see him as a human being like me. I deeply believe that by executing him, we will simply lose a human life without dealing with the root cause. And I strongly believe that if he was given a chance to live, he might be able to become a better human being. I began to see him as a human being like me, and as a victim as well.

[00:56:30] So when I came from Mecca, from the pilgrimage, I decided to do something to save his life from Texas's death row. And with the support of Amnesty International, my good friends Hadi Jawad, and Professor Rick Halperin from Southern Methodist University, and lots of other people from all walks of lives, Christians, Hindus, Jewish, Muslims, atheists, to help support this campaign to save my attacker from Texas death row. And when that news broke out, that the victim of a hate crime is trying to save his attacker from Texas death row, it became a national news. And again, I did not do anything to get any kind of news attention or any kind of name or fame.

[00:57:37] It was purely out of love. It was purely out of forgiveness and desire to save a life, because I know how I felt being on the brink of death. How I begged God to give me a second chance. And I'm sure this human being, my attacker, sitting in death row, must be asking for a second chance, must be asking for forgiveness, even though he never reached out to us. And as I saw him as a human being like me, I felt connected. Connected with him in a human capacity. I saw him as a brother in humanity. I did no longer see him as an evil person, as my would-be killer. And that gave me the courage and the strength, the power of forgiveness, my upbringing, to go the extra mile to try to save the life of the man who tried to end mine.

[00:58:53] And then it became a national news, and then it became an international news, which was good and also important, because it gave us more momentum. It gave us credibility. It gave us a platform. It gave me a voice to do the right thing, to save a human life, to set a new narrative that hate is not the answer of hate. We all have the power to show mercy and kindness to the people who were not nice to us, who were hateful, who hurt us. But we don't have to hurt them back to stop the cycle of hate and violence. If we truly want to live in a peaceful society, we need to find ways to minimize the pain, debunk myths, overcome ignorance and fear and intolerance. So yes, when I forgave my attacker in public, launched a global campaign. It became national, international news.

Moureen Kaki [01:00:19] Wow. Wow. And I mean, you've hinted at this as you were explaining this, but would you mind elaborating or would you mind sharing, why do you think that's what drove people to be interested in your story? Why do you think it took that and not the hate crime itself, and the fact that Mark Stroman had killed two people before already, but more the fact that you, as a victim of his violence chose to be very vocal and lead this campaign?

Rais Bhuiyan [01:00:56] Well, because we live in a society where we see that if you hurt people, you commit a crime, you have to pay for it. That's plain and simple. We do not hear much about forgiveness. We do not hear much about letting people go free. We do not hear much about coming together through understanding, mercy, and forgiveness. What is normal is eye for an eye. You committed a crime, you have to pay for it. Mercy and forgiveness is something rare, and especially in this case. He killed two, and he almost killed myself, and he was given death penalty. In a normal sense, he should be executed. He killed two people and almost killed one, so the jury's verdict should be [inaudible]. So that's the norm. That's the normal thing. And nobody would question if my attacker was executed simply without any kind of news or any kind of options to get a second chance. It would not be a news that he killed, he was killed. News closed, case closed.

[01:03:00] But it got attention because the victim of his hate was fighting to save his life from death row. It was very unheard of. It's not just only victims wrote a letter to the authority and asked for lowering punishment or considered to give a second chance. It was more than that. Victims were going the extra mile to save a life, to set a new narrative that even though we have the options to seek eye for an eye, but that will only make the whole world blind and toothless. It's not going to repair the world. It is not going to end the cycle of hate and violence, through understanding, empathy, and forgiveness. We might be able to create a better society.

[01:04:16] So people got that. People all over the world felt that in order to end the madness, in order to break the cycle of hate and violence, we need to talk more about understanding, empathy, and forgiveness. And this story gave them hope. This story gave them a new narrative that it is possible. Forgiveness is possible. Compassion, empathy is possible despite the bitter experiences in the past. I believe because of that, it got a lot of attention. It got a lot of media attention that we, that human beings, are capable of transforming negatives into positives, weaknesses into strength, fear into courage, and hate into love. And this story demonstrated this very powerfully.

Moureen Kaki [01:05:36] Honestly, I'm pretty stunned, I gotta say. I mean, it's an incredible level of forgiveness and love and belief and empathy and compassion. Wow, I'm really awestruck, genuinely. And could you tell us, Rais, what happened with that campaign? How long did it last? What was the outcome of the results? What was it like for you?

Rais Bhuiyan [01:06:14] Well, I never imagined that one day, this is what I would do in America, fighting to save a human life. But if we keep ourselves open, and if we pay attention to what is happening around us, if we always try to do the next right thing, in the right way, for the right reason, you never know how life would unfold. So with the help of Amnesty International, my friends Professor Halperin and Hadi Jawad, and a lot of supporters from locally, nationally, and internationally, we also partnered with Reprieve, a London-based nonprofit, and took our campaign to the European Union and German parliament, as well as the headquarters of Lundbeck, the lethal injection manufacturer in Denmark. And we were able to convince them to urge the governor of Texas not to use

their product to kill human beings. And as a result of our visit at the end of 2011, Lundbeck announced that it would stop supplying the drug to the US prisons carrying out executions.

[01:07:47] We also petitioned the US Supreme Court, asking for clemency for my attacker. And when my attacker heard about all this, he couldn't believe. When he heard from his attorney that one of his victims was running a campaign to save his life from death row, I was told he was reduced to tears because this was not something he expected from a Muslim. He thanked the entire Muslim community for their support and call me "brother" in a phone conversation, and he said he loved me. And in a statement, he said that, "In a free world, I was free, but was locked up in prison inside of myself because of the hate I carried in my heart. It is due to Rais's message of forgiveness, I'm more content now than ever before." He also wrote a long letter to me from death row, and I would like to read a paragraph.

[01:09:22] He said that, "My stepfather taught me some lessons that I should have never learned. I have unlearned some of them, and I'm still working on some of them. I don't know who your parents were, but it's obvious they're wonderful people to lead you to act this way to someone you have every right to hate." Despite all our efforts, Mark was executed on July 20, 2011. But before he was executed, I was able to speak with him for a few moments. And when I called the prison, and he was on the other line, honestly, I was thinking, "What could I say to a human being who is about to be executed, who is sitting next to his death chamber?" It's cruel. It's humiliating. It's painful. No matter who that person is, that is a human being. We all want to end our life in a peaceful, in a comfortable way. But now I'm about to speak with a person who tried to end my life, and now he's sitting next to execution chamber about to embrace death shortly. What could I tell him?

[01:11:24] It was very emotional for me. And when I heard him on the other side asking me, "Rais, how are you?" It was very emotional to hear his voice, his friendly voice, not the angry man when he came to my gas station ten years ago. Very angry, very loud, asking me where I was from, about to end my life. And now here, his friendly voice, I felt like I was talking with my brother. And he said that, "I never expected this from you. Thank you for doing everything you are doing to try to save my life. I love you bro." And when he said that, my eyes were misty. I could not stop thinking, "Why you could not say the same thing ten years ago?" I was scared after 9/11. Instead of pulling the trigger, he could have asked me, "Are you okay? What can I do to help you? You are my brother."

[01:13:01] And now ten years later, here I'm fighting to save your life. And I was about to go to the courtroom to start the final hearing in hopes of stopping this execution. And now my attacker just told me that he loves me as his brother. It was very emotional. It was very powerful. And then he said, "I have to go. They're calling me now." And I couldn't imagine what was going on in his mind at that moment, seeing himself sitting next to the execution chamber. And here in the free world, I was about to go and give a last fight to save his life, to save a human life.

[01:14:17] And I felt the pressure, extreme pressure my shoulder, that if I do a good job, if I could convince the judge, a human being survives. If I failed to convince the judge, if I don't do a good job, he dies today. It was awful, awful pressure. It was extremely painful because I felt like that a lot of people in the free world at that moment trying to save a human life. At the same time, another group of human being are trying their best to take this human life. And while I was testifying in the court, I could not stop crying, because I didn't want him to die that day. I wanted him to live and find ways to make a difference in

the world, helping people like him in the free world not to follow his footsteps, not to hate and hurt people, because of who they are.

[01:15:38] I saw there was a lot of benefit for the human society, if we could keep him alive. He could contribute from behind bars to prevent and disrupt the cycle of hate and violence. And people could learn from his lived experiences, people in the free world could learn from his mistakes, and that would have been a true balance between justice and mercy. I wasn't asking the governor or the justice system to let him go free. My request was to save his life, give him a second chance, the chance he never received, to repair, to rehabilitate, to become a better human being. And there are a lot of people in our free world who need a second chance, who need to repair, to rehabilitate, to rebuild, to be a better human being. But unfortunately, they don't receive that kind of guidance, support, or the second chance.

[01:17:10] So in the end, my attacker Mark Stroman was executed. The campaign did not end there. Yes, we could not save his life. We could not save my attacker, but I did not end there. I established a nonprofit called World Without Hate to prevent and disrupt the cycle of hate and violence, to encourage and inspire people to be more compassionate, empathetic understanding, and inclusive, and to find ways to work for a world without violence, without victims, and a world without hate.

Moureen Kaki [01:18:21] That is a truly remarkable story and motivation Rais. I mean, I'm genuine awe here. I want to ask you something. This is not coming from me, but I'm curious, because I'm sure people who listen to your story, somebody out there would wonder, they might ask you something like, "This is great, the philosophy behind this campaign and your motivation to preserve human life is without question a good thing." But what would you say to somebody if they'd asked you, for example, "Why? Why focus on the man who caused you such trauma and such violence, when, for example, there are other folks there that could also use help?" I guess ultimately the question comes down to - even though it sounds strange - why this level of compassion for somebody? Clearly you believe that people can change, but I'm just curious, what would you say to people who had that question? Because I'm sure that people who hear your story, somebody might have that question.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:19:37] Well, it is not only compassion and empathy for my attacker. Compassion, empathy, forgiveness is for all, it's not just my attacker deserves because he committed a heinous crime. When you talk about forgiveness, we definitely talk about when we are hurt, when people hurt us, when people are mean to us. You do not talk about forgiving someone who was kind to you or who was nice to you. We talk about forgiveness, when we are wronged. My attacker caused tremendous pain and suffering to me and to the victim's families as well. And we combined and did our best to save his life. We showed him mercy. We forgave him, even though he never reached out to us, apologizing, telling sorry to us. I mean, I reached out to him with the blessings of other victims' families, to let him know that he's forgiven.

[01:21:06] It's not that we forgot what he did to us. It's not that by forgiving him, his action was minimized, or it never happened. Yes, it happened, and we will never forget what happened, what he did to us. But the goal here was finding ways to move forward, and also finding ways to heal ourselves, find some closure, and forgiveness helps to heal, to find closure to move forward. And it helped not only us, it also helped our attacker, Mark Stroman. And if you see the beauty at the end, that because of this forgiveness, because of this kindness, empathy, he was able to transform. He was able to find himself. In the

worst possible place on earth, he was able to be a better human being. He found Jesus Christ, peace be upon him, in death row. This transformation was possible because of the love, the kindness, the mercy, forgiveness he found from the people he once hated. And also from the pen pals, from all the people came into his life, helped him to change his views, thoughts, and ideas and go through a transformation.

[01:22:42] So if you see the big picture, the mercy, kindness, forgiveness, empathy, if we could practice with one another, if we could forgive people, if we could show empathy and kindness to people who are not nice to us, who are hateful and harmful, I'm not asking just go and blindly forgive everybody, or just be kind to the people who constantly hurting and harming you. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about when we are able to forgive, do that. When we are able to show kindness, at the same time, we need to also put a boundary, because forgiveness cannot be a blank check. Kindness cannot be something as a blank check, that we are showing kindness, even though we're being hurt and wronged by the same person. Then we are just giving the other people a signal that, "You can hurt me again and again, because I'm going to forgive you or I'm going to be kind, and I will show mercy to you, no matter what you do to me."

[01:23:51] That is stupidity. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about that to find ways to move forward, find ways to heal ourselves, forgiveness helps a lot. Compassion, empathy helps a lot. And if we are not able to forgive people, if you're not able to show kindness, that's okay. As long as we do not seek revenge, as long as we do not go back and try to cause more hate, more harm. That's okay, find ways to move forward, find ways to help heal yourself, that's perfectly fine. We don't have to forgive the people who hurt us, and we don't want to forgive them, that's perfectly fine. As long as you don't go back into the same mistake, or take more than you lost.

Moureen Kaki [01:24:52] What a great way to put it. Fantastic explanation. And really, honestly, I think an admirable philosophy to live by. Thank you so much for explaining that. Rais, you mentioned your call with Mark as he was getting called to the execution chamber. And you mentioned the sadness of when you spoke in court one last time. But I heard you say earlier about how it was a matter of you felt like you didn't do good enough to try to save him. Do you feel a personal guilt that the campaign didn't succeed?

Rais Bhuiyan [01:25:38] Not really. I went above and beyond with the help of my friends, mentors, people who all came forward to save his life. We went above and beyond. There was no doubt about that. We did not fail. In the end, love and humanity won. We showed that to this campaign, to this work, that when we are driven by empathy, love, forgiveness, kindness, we can move mountains. We may not be able to achieve exactly what we fought for, but for sure, I can tell from my experience that people will be able to make huge impact. We did not lose the case. We did not fail. We won in the end, because my attacker was in peace. He was in comfort. Yes, of course, we didn't want him to die in this way, but in the end, he was in peace. That is most important. He was not bitter. He was not angry in the end.

[01:27:19] Rather, he said something very powerful right before his execution, and these were his last words. He said that, "Hate is going on everywhere. It has to stop. Hate causes a lifetime of pain." He wouldn't be able to come to this understanding and this maturity without the love, kindness, forgiveness, and friendship from people all over the world, especially from his victims and victims' families. So yes, we did not lose in the end. It was not our failure. It was the failure of the system, of the justice system, that they failed to realize that the benefit of keeping this person, keeping this human being alive - if their

goal is to end violence, if their goal is to punish people, to repair and rehabilitate and end killing, murder, then they need to think in a different way, because killing people for previous killing, is not actually helping. It's not ending, it's not reducing the number of homicide. It's not reducing the number of hate-filled violence.

[01:29:07] We need to find ways to repair, to help people repair and rehabilitate. And once we punish people, we need to ensure that others are learning from this punishment and from their mistakes. Otherwise, it's just a cycle. Keep running. People are murdering, coming into death row, and getting executed. The cycle continues. People are committing heinous crime, they're being punished, locked up in prison, and once they're gone, once they're out, there is very little support structure that prevents them returning into the prison again, and that's why the returning rate in the US prison is 78%, whereas in Norway, it is only 18%. So back to your point that I do not believe that we failed. We won. And as I said before that in the end humanity and love won.

Moureen Kaki [01:30:33] Wow. Wow yeah, for Mark to get to that point, that's a beautiful way to characterize a success, honestly, a subtly beautiful way to characterize it and appreciate the effort that it takes to make that kind of change. Thank you so much for that answer. Rais, so the campaign lasted ten years for you following the attack. Where are you now? Is World Without Hate still carrying on? What's the mission? Are you a part of it? How's that going?

Rais Bhuiyan [01:31:23] Well, I founded World Without Hate back in 2010, and we are on our twelfth year journey with the mission of preventing and disrupting hate and violence. Through World Without Hate, we inspire and encourage people to be more kind and compassionate, empathetic and understanding. And in the last twelve years, we have reached out to people all over the world starting from New Zealand to Denmark, in the UK, in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Brazil, all over the world, we have reached out to people virtually and also in person.

[01:32:16] World Without Hate has launched several initiatives in last several years. One of them was our signature program, Empathy Ambassador program. It's designed to teach empathy as a critical life skill. Recently, we added a virtual reality component into this program to teach empathy, and also to take our audience to places where they would not feel comfortable going, or the place would not be safe and secure enough to take the participants there to give them an experience. Like for example, what it feels like to live in a refugee camp. What it feels like to live in a war-torn country. What it feels like to live in a neighborhood where there is a lot of social injustice, like for example, gun violence, poverty, racism, drug abuse. We want to take our participants to those places to give them an experience. And then virtual reality is designed to do that. So we have our first VR component, VR content, ready to give our participants that kind of experience. And also, it is designed to help meet people that they would not meet generally or normally. So with this VR component, we're very hopeful that we will definitely make a huge impact on removing cultural barriers, helping people to meet people, usually that would not meet them. And that is one aspect of this Empathy Ambassador program.

[01:34:15] We also launched a new initiative called Healing and Reconciliation Initiative, under which we have launched our first documentary film program. Our first feature length documentary is called Pain and Peace, and through this documentary, we are going to share human stories from both victims' and victimizers' perspective, that how people are able to get beyond their bitter experiences, pain, and suffering, how they're able to find ways to begin a new and meaningful life, despite the pain and suffering they went through,

or they inflicted upon others. And so far, it has become a very powerful documentary. We have not completed the project yet. We are in the editing phase right now. Last one year, we have traveled all over North America, collected stories from people all walks of lives, and our hope through this documentary is to help people heal, reconcile, and find ways to tackle their ignorance, intolerance, hate, and violence, and also reach out to people who were affected by hate fueled violence, and find ways to help and support them.

[01:35:52] Because I can tell from my experience that once my shooting incident happened in the very first few years, it was extremely tough for me, as there was no support structure. Even the 9/11 Commission explicitly ensured that the victims of hate crimes of 9/11 would not be considered as victims of 9/11. So there was very little to no support structure for the hate crime victims of 9/11. And I know and I've seen the other two widows who lost their husbands, how they struggled to survive. A homemaker become a gas station clerk, working fifteen to fourteen hours per day, seven days a week. Another widow started working in a graveyard shift in a factory leaving four teenage daughters at home at night. So these are very painful experience, life's journey. And through this documentary, we're trying to share some of the stories to help people find ways to come forward and help others, those who need help.

[01:37:15] So that's our documentary, our feature length documentary. Once it is done, we're hoping by the first quarter of next year, our goal is to produce more thirty to forty minutes length documentary film every year, to showcase more human stories, because human stories build bridges, help debunk myths, stereotypes, ignorance and fear. And at the end, it helps people to come together and see one another as human beings. And the third thing we did for last seven years was passing a resolution of the US Congress to recognize the hate crime victims of 9/11. I had the honor to work with Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson from Dallas, Texas office to submit a resolution, to US Congress to recognize the hate crime victims of 9/11. It's been seven years I've been working with their office. And in 2015, Congresswoman Johnson submitted the resolution, but it was not our time to get it passed. I went back to her office in 2021, as it was the 20th anniversary of 9/11. And Congresswoman Johnson, again, submitted the resolution on the day of my twenty-first shooting anniversary.

[01:38:57] So this resolution, House Resolution 662 is being under review by the House Judiciary and Oversight Committee since September 21, 2021. And we are hopeful that this Congress, or the new Congress, will help to pass this bipartisan - I'm sorry, to pass this nonpartisan, non-political resolution to help heal the hate crime victims of 9/11. And there's another initiative. And through World Without Hate website and our public engagements, we help people to find ways to see one another as humans first, regardless of who they are, where they came from, and also take time to learn from one another. And our goal is to build a world where we and our next generations will coexist respectfully and peacefully. We're trying to create a culture of empathy, understanding, and inclusion, so there'll be less hate, less violence, more understanding, and more inclusion.

Moureen Kaki [01:40:36] What a beautiful, much-needed mission, and thank you so much for sharing that and are taking the charge on such work, especially given what you have to reconcile in terms of your experience with that, the notion of this work, so thank you so much.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:40:57] You're welcome.

Moureen Kaki [01:40:59] Rais, we are close to two hours, I think, about an hour and forty-five minutes into the interview here. So I wanted to ask you, how is life like for you outside of this? I mean, what do you do when you're not working on World Without Hate or your IT job that you've got? What's your personal life look like these days?

Rais Bhuiyan [01:41:23] So when I get some time, some free time, I am a long runner. I love to run. So either I am on a treadmill if the weather is bad, or I'm outside running at least couple of miles every other day if that is possible. I grew up as a long runner, and I truly enjoy running. And I love taking pictures, especially nature and living beings. So when I get time, I take my camera and along with my wife, we go outside in the park, in nature, in mountains or whatever we can, just go out and take pictures. And even though she tells me that I should put those pictures into a frame and hang on the wall, those that look very professional, very powerful pictures, but I take picture as a hobby, not to hang on the wall or show it to people. So I enjoy photography. And also I play tennis when I get some free time.

Moureen Kaki [01:42:53] Sounds like you keep very busy there, which is important, of course. But that's awesome. Thank you so much for sharing, Rais.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:43:02] Thank you, this -.

Moureen Kaki [01:43:02] Yeah, please.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:43:03] Life is short, our time is limited, and I learned that on my deathbed that we don't have unlimited time, our time is limited. So make the best use of your time to see the beauty of this world, to enjoy the company of your loved ones. Don't spend your time behind hating, hurting, or remain angry, or sad and depressed. I know it's not easy sometimes to get beyond the bitter experiences, the sadness, the depression, but we all could at least try to find ways to endure that time. Seek help. See something new, a different country, a different city, different culture, meet different people. Because once you get to know the other, it is hard for you to hate them. And I learned this from my own life, from my own lived experiences. And I enjoy going to places, seeing the beauty of this world, and also try to understand that God created all this for us, for us to enjoy, not to remain sad, bitter, angry, and hateful, and hurtful.

Moureen Kaki [01:44:23] Absolutely, absolutely. That's absolutely great advice to take advantage of every moment, because you simply don't know what's going to happen next.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:44:34] Absolutely. Yeah, exactly.

Moureen Kaki [01:44:36] Yeah. Rais, do you have any? Do you have any mentors or people you would consider guidance? I know you mentioned earlier the three amigos: Dr. Rick, Hadi Jawad, and you, of course. But do you have people - maybe they're considered amongst them - but do you have people that you would call mentors or things that you've looked towards for guidance through all of this? Yeah, absolutely.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:45:04] The best mentor and the best guide is our Prophet, is our beloved Prophet, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Now his life is full of stories of mercy, kindness and forgiveness. The very people who caused so much hurt, so much pain and suffering into his life, his companions' life, he was always merciful to those people. And that's why he earned the title ar-Rahmah Ili-Alamin, and also the most merciful to the entire mankind. And also at a very young age, even the very people who

did not like him, they used to call him al-Amin, the most trustworthy. Even people didn't like him, but when they went for any kind of business trip, they used to keep their belongings to him. So our Prophet is a source of wisdom, guidance, and also is the best mentor.

[01:46:12] And as a human being, I'm not perfect. I have my own flaws, but I, I try to imitate him in every situation that if my prophet was in this situation, what he would do, what he would do. It helps me a lot thinking of him and putting him in situation. And I ask myself if my prophet would do this in this situation, maybe I should do that. And the basis of all those, of course, the kindness and the mercy and the forgiveness and the gentle tone, the soft voice. It helps when you are angry. You know, when I'm angry, I immediately. You know, keep my mouth shut, control my tongue, take a pause and think about did my prophet show his anger to people who were mean to him, how he responded to those people? And he tells them right there, no, he was kind. He was he was respectful, even the people who didn't respect him.

Moureen Kaki [01:47:26] Excuse me, thank you so much for sharing that. I think that's a beautiful answer that will resonate with folks as well, and who probably won't be surprised by your answer for that, honestly, but thank you. Rais as we're wrapping up here, I'm very grateful for your time. I want to just ask you, if there's anything else you would like to share before we wrap up here, because I think those are the questions that I have for you, so I just want to give you space to share any final thoughts or messages or go back and add on something that you missed an opportunity to expand on, if you wanted.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:48:10] Well, the last thing I would love to say that as a human being, I'm not perfect, but I constantly try to be a better human being than yesterday. And there are a few things I'd love to share here with anyone listening this conversation, that what I try to do in my own life constantly, that is replace my arrogance with forgiveness, and anger with empathy and understanding. When I talk about arrogance, I'm not saying that I'm better than anyone. Not in that sense. As a human being sometimes, we feel like that, "I'm better than XYZ," or "I'm better than this. I'm better than that." It may come into our mind. It is normal. But how can we keep it in check is by thinking about others, that actually I'm not better than anyone simply because who I am. If I want to be better than somebody, it has to be because of the action, the piety. And I would ask people that they stand up against human suffering. Do not pick and choose. If you see someone is suffering, stand up and do your best to help. And treat people as human beings, regardless of who they are. The last thing I would say that, take time to learn from one another. Because once you get to know the other, it is hard for you to hate them.

Moureen Kaki [01:50:13] Incredibly wise words, and once again Rais, I cannot thank you enough for coming here today and sharing your story and your experiences with not only what happened to you regarding the attack, but the subsequent organization of World Without Hate, and your continued work and dedication towards forgiveness and valuing human life and realizing that value on such a profound scale. And yeah, thank you so much again for the work that you do and for your story that you shared. I hope folks really get the chance to listen to this interview and listen to it all the way through, because there's so much in here that's incredibly powerful and so moving and so inspiring and absolutely so much to learn from, I cannot thank you enough.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:51:11] Well Maureen, thank you so very much for your interest in my story and also doing all the tough work to create this podcast and also sharing the story with people and hoping that it will make an impact, it will inspire people to get beyond their bitter experiences, it will help people to find ways to contribute to make this world a better

place for us, and for our next generation. So I thank you for your time and your effort to do this work. Thank you once again.

Moureen Kaki [01:51:51] It's absolutely my pleasure and, God willing, inshallah, your message is heard and your voice is heard and people are changed. Rais Bhuiyan, on our podcast today, 9/11, 20 Years Later. Thank you so much.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:52:07] You're very welcome. Have a good one.

Moureen Kaki [01:52:10] You too.

Rais Bhuiyan [01:52:10] Okay. Bye bye.