

Br. Abdul Kareem Aberra



By: Br. Ryan Ramchandar

Abdul Kareem is a name I am sure many of you know. Many of you have probably met Abdul Kareem at the masjid

for Isha prayer or at Safeway buying groceries. Many of you see him around or at least know of him, but how many

of you actually know anything about him?

I had the opportunity to sit down with Abdul Kareem to learn about him and his past. I have known Abdul Kareem

for roughly two years now and I have become good friends with him over time. I started asking him some questions

and he began to confide in me about his past.

Abdul Kareem was born in Eritrea to a large well known business family in which he had four brothers and four

sisters. At seven he was a regular boy who liked to play sports, especially soccer which was his favourite. He tells

me that he was always the best player on his team. In the next few years war became more prevalent in the area

where he lived and Abdul had to leave at the age of fourteen. He and some of his brothers and sisters walked to

Sudan. He then traveled to Jeddah by plane, where he lived for two and a half years. After living in Jeddah, Abdul

and the others, moved to Italy where they remained for three more years. After spending time in Italy, Abdul wanted

to study and find a job abroad, which resulted in his arrival in Toronto. Abdul was now in a new country and was

ready to look for work. From Toronto, Abdul found many jobs in different cities such as Medicine Hat, Halifax and

eventually in Winnipeg.

Abdul tells me that he had many jobs, some of which included driving trucks, buses, and taxis. He was also a skilled

handyman and did a lot of carpentry jobs and wood working. Abdul dreamed to study law at the University of

Manitoba. After facing all the hardships and struggles of leaving his home country to live abroad, Abdul's life took a

turn for the worst...

Fifteen years ago in August of 1992 around 6:00 AM while working as a taxi driver, Abdul was attacked and

savagely beaten. A man flagged down his taxi cab for a ride and when Abdul stopped, three other men came out

from nowhere and they all attacked and beat him. Abdul was left in a coma where he would remain for many days.

He became paralyzed down the right side of his body due to an injury to the left side of his brain. He lost the ability

to walk, talk and also the ability to hear out of his right ear.

Abdul spent many months in rehabilitation at the hospital where he slowly began to regain feeling and the ability to

talk and hear. Abdul points out to me that, alhumdulillah, his vision was not affected. Many family and friends came

to visit him while he was in the hospital. His close friend Ismael Mukhtar was especially there for him by his side.

Slowly as he began to heal with the help of Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala, about five years ago Abdul began to take his

first steps again. Today, Abdul is still greatly dependent on his wheel chair and his cane when he walks. Even so,

despite his current state he is very ambitious and optimistic that he will one day not need the wheel chair at all,

inshallah. Abdul is still not able to speak properly, and he can only say a few words here and there. (This has made

the interview a little bit tricky as I always have to decipher what he is trying to say). Since he cannot speak in

complete sentences he will spell words out on his leg, write things down, or make you guess what he is trying to say

until you guess correctly. Abdul has had many sessions of speech therapy in which he feels he is progressing.

However, unfortunately, his speech therapy has been impeded due to the speech therapists and doctors saying that

his speech cannot be developed any further.

I feel very sad for Abdul, because almost every time I meet him he reminds me of the fact that nothing is being done

to improve his speech when he feels it can be improved. After many phone calls to speech therapists, however, it is

always the same case where they say nothing more can be done. I pray that one day Abdul gets his speech back, as it

is one thing he really truly wishes he had. Nevertheless, even though Abdul has been crippled physically in many

ways, he is mentally strong and very determined. Above all else, his faith in Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala is immense.

Abdul is a very diverse individual who has learned many languages such as Arabic, Italian, English, two east

African languages during his travels. Following the attack he even learned sign language. He keeps active by regularly going to the gym to swim and exercise. He also still loves to work with his hands; he attends a woods shop

where he crafts wood replicas of countries and gives them to others as gifts. Actually, Abdul tells me that before his

accident, he had helped build some of the shoe racks, coat racks, and even the mimbar that we still use today at the

masjid in St. Vital. He also tells me he plans to make the mimbar for the Grand Mosque on Waverley since they do

not have one yet. Abdul is the kind of person who is very resilient, determined and never gives up. He attends the

masjid for night prayers almost every other night, and last year he completed his Hajj despite his physical condition

and the discouragement of others who thought it was beyond his ability. Abdul Kareem is a prime example that,

despite severe adversity, if you work hard, have patience, and ultimately have faith in Allah you can achieve many

things and be successful, inshallah.

Abdul would like to say thank you to all those who have been there to support him, helped him and had patience

with him. May Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala reward you for the good you have done.

Comments from Ismael Mukhtar:

"I have known Abdulkareem for many years. We lived in the same neighborhood in Asmara, the capital of

Eritrea, and went to the same schools. After leaving our home land, we met after many years in Italy and later

in Winnipeg. Abdulkareem went through a difficult experience that left him severely disabled. I visited him

in the hospital when he was in a coma; I never thought that he will recover. Through a long process of rehabilitation, he has come a long way. Having observed him recover gradually over the years, I have come

to admire him immensely. His resilience, his determination and his will power is astounding. Abdulkareem

has been dreaming of going for hajj for years. I was among the first people he talked to. I strongly

discouraged him telling him it is beyond his physical capacity. Other people he spoke to also discouraged him, but he kept on insisting, until he fulfilled his dream and successfully completed his hajj. Abdul Kareem's attachment to the masjid is admirable. Because of him most of the non-Muslim tax drivers easily know the Hazelwood masjid. Every time you go for Isha prayer to the masjid, even if it extremely cold, Abdulkareem is the first person you would meet, with his typical smile and occasionally with a list of issues and complaints...."

(2006 records)