

Dr. Jennifer Rahman

Interviewed by: Lisa Kibria

L: Tell us about yourself (where were you born, where were you brought up, hobbies, work, etc.)?

J: I was born in Barnsley, in Yorkshire, England. My family moved to Canada on my 6th birthday, and we lived in New Brunswick for one year, then proceeded to Manitoba, where we lived in Flin Flon, Steinbach and eventually settled in Winnipeg. My parents hail from Bangladesh where most of my extended family resides. I am currently working in Winnipeg as an Ophthalmologist (Eye Physician and Surgeon) with a particular interest in Glaucoma. My hobbies include reading, canoeing, kayaking and traveling.

L: When did you decide to pursue a career in medicine?

J: I have a tremendous respect for my father who is a physician, and have wanted to follow in his footsteps from a young age. His hard work, dedication and genuine concern for his patients inspired me and promoted medicine as the only career for me.

L: What were your experiences as a young Muslim woman entering into a competitive field?

J: I had to apply myself and work very hard to achieve my goals. It was not easy. I did not get into medicine on the first try. I recall feeling very discouraged and frustrated on one occasion. I sat down and opened an English translation of the Qur'an and read these words "patiently persevere for the promise of God is true". Being a Muslim woman has not held me back from pursuing this profession. Rather, it has provided me with strength of resolve to eventually succeed.

L: Through all your triumphs and hardships, what is the most important pillar in your life that keeps you grounded?

J: My faith in Allah SWT has been the ultimate pillar of strength in my life. Prayer is an open connection to Allah SWT; a designated time when I can spend with the Creator to relax my mind and focus on true and good purpose. I have also been blessed with wonderful and loving parents and siblings who have supported and advised me throughout my times of difficulty and self-doubt.

L: Alhumdullilah, the Winnipeg Muslim community has a number of active members dedicating countless hours towards the betterment of our community, such as yourself. What's your involvement in the community and how has it impacted your life?

J: My involvement dates back to when I was a youth of 16 and getting involved in summer youth camps as a counselor. I was inspired to strive to develop a good character and work towards the betterment of society in general. In the past, I was actively involved in the Muslim Youth Council (MYC), and the Queen's University Muslim Students' Association. More recently, I have been involved in establishing the Winnipeg Central Mosque (WCM) and currently chair the WCM Council. I am also playing an active role in organizing the *Manitoba Muslim Youth Camp at Camp Brereton, Whiteshell National Park*, which started up again in 2007. We are looking forward to another successful camp this year insha'Allah: *GIRLS: 14-19 July 2008; BOYS 19-24 July 2008; Leadership training 24-27 July 2008*. Our camp theme this year is "*Islam: Are you living it?*". I want to encourage Muslim youth to participate in the camp where they will meet new friends and be motivated to take a more active community role.

L: What have you learned from participating in community events and how has this carried through into other parts of your life?

J: Community work requires good communication, dedication, patience and tolerance. Diverse opinions will always exist and must be discussed in a respectful manner.

In my youth, I used to feel that my community was just composed of Muslims. Now I have a broader perspective and feel that my community includes not only Muslims, but also my non-Muslim neighbors, friends and colleagues, that is the community at large. I have learned to appreciate and care about the greater community and feel that being a Muslim encourages me to do so.

L: With the community growing steadily, it seems increasingly difficult to attract Muslim youth and adults to various community events. In your opinion what are some barriers to bringing youth out to activities and becoming active participants in youth events such as Summer Youth camps?

J: Judgmental and overly critical attitudes can be substantial barriers of youth and adult involvement. We need to recognize the diversity of approaches within our community, respect each other and be tolerant. Our leaders need to show that we are cognizant and up to date on current events and are progressive enough to meet the challenges that face our community. We need to acknowledge our uniquely Muslim Canadian identity, and allow our youth to embrace their Islamic as well as their Canadian upbringing, and realize that these two identities do not have to be at odds with each other. We can be both Muslim and Canadian without any internal conflict or contradiction. Islam is a balanced way of life and Prophet Muhammad SAW, was the model of moderation.

L: The Muslims across the world are enduring numerous hardships not only externally but internally within our own Ummah. What do you think the role of the Muslim youth is for the future?

J: Muslim youth need to establish themselves in the world, by working hard and getting a good general and religious education. Leading a balanced and healthy life is very important since a Muslim must attend to the needs of the body, mind and the soul. I would encourage all Muslim youth to establish a relationship with Allah SWT. This is the first step to unending success in this life and the hereafter. Insha'Allah, with such preparation, Muslim youth will be able to further the work of their parents' generation, in maintaining and strengthening the vibrant institutions already developed and working towards building cross-cultural and interfaith bridges.

L: Any advice for the Muslim youth today on how to get involved within our community?

J: The best advice I can give is to be pro-active. There are activities such as the upcoming summer camp, various sports activities, halaqas and weekend schools to get involved in. However, if you have any new ideas, feel free to pitch them to any of the community leaders and GET GOING. In the last issue of the MB Muslim, I was so pleased to hear about Muslim students at Fort Richmond Collegiate taking initiative and praying Jumu'a together. Two sisters also started the Muslim youth "Seeds" magazine. I would like to encourage Muslim youth to think "outside the box". There are a lot of worthy causes right here in Winnipeg which need volunteers. What better way of practicing true Islam and doing dawah than to organize a group of Muslim youth to participate in a "walk-a-thon" for breast cancer, for example, or delivering meals-on-wheels to elderly, house-bound people? We should support good work wherever we see it, and broaden our perspective and our definition of community.

*Lisa Kibria, Born and raised in Winnipeg. Current graduate from U of M, Physiotherapy.

(2008 records)