



Registration No. 201608



Hands Across America 1986

Building Cultural Bridges



Living Peace Sign in Budapest's Grand Heroes Square 2007

The inspiration for this Journey

On September 17th, 2001 I arrived with my son John Gabriel Rivera at Drexel University in Philadelphia for Fall Registration, less than a week after the deadly terrorist attacks of 9/11. By the end of his freshman year, he told us he'd enlisted in the Army Infantry, and that he'd requested assignment to the Army 10th Mountain Division because they were the most highly deployed unit in Afghanistan. But instead the Army deployed him to Irbil, in Northern Iraq in early 2003, two months ahead of Coalition Forces gathering in Kuwait. There he was attached to an Army Ranger Unit embedded with the Kurdish Forces to defend the rich northern oil fields against the Iraqi Republican Guard.



Spc. John Gabriel Rivera with Kurdish Soldier



The Mosque of the Prophet Jirjis in Mosul, Iraq in 2003 (Destroyed by ISIS on July 27th, 2014)



Spc. John Gabriel Rivera with Kurdish locals

My wife and I were extremely proud of our son, but terrified at the same time that he'd placed himself at the front line of this war. It troubled us that the war had expanded into Iraq, a country which had not attacked us on 9/11, but once our soldiers were on the ground, the time for debate was over and we fully supported the troops. My son had similar concerns, but committed himself supporting the Kurds and his brother soldiers. In that time he came to respect the Kurds and know them as good friends. He said they were generous beyond measure, and gave much of themselves even if they had little to give. One day an Iraqi Merchant showed up and told the soldiers he could provide them with anything they wanted. Most asked for Coca Colas, candy bars, magazines, etc., but my son surprised him and asked if he could get a copy of the Koran, one in English and another in Arabic. The Merchant was surprised, and when he asked why, my son said he wanted to better understand the Kurds he was serving with. Two weeks later the Merchant returned with two leather bound, gold leaf Korans, and when my son tried to pay him, he insisted they were a gift and that no payment could possibly be accepted.

My son returned home safe, and later returned home twice again after three tours in Iraq. The war had changed him profoundly, and us as well. I often think about the Kurds my son proudly served with and that Iraqi Merchant who so graciously gifted my son with two precious Korans, and it's those events that bring me now to this moment where I see an opportunity through Xplore to honor that kindness, generosity and grace from these people whom I've never met. I wish to do my small part in this complicated world to build bridges between our two cultures and share the stories of these Muslims who walk among us in the light of God's grace.



Young Kurdish Shepards in Northern Iraq



The Journey Begins

The first part of this journey would begin here in Riverside where I've reached out to a local Sufi Muslim community and begun a dialog with a good friend I've known for years and others I've only just met, to compare both our life experiences as Americans of strong ethnic and spiritual roots, and focus on the common beliefs and values we share in our daily lives. This discussion would include what it means to be a Muslim-American in daily life, in the workplace and in social settings among various people from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

This journey would then continue onto Dearborn, Michigan in which the largest population of Muslim-Americans reside in the United States. There I plan to continue the dialog with friends I've only recently come to know in my outreach to Muslims and discuss what it means to pursue the American Dream as a Muslim-American. Then to further discuss what it means to be a second or third generation Muslim-American, living as a native born citizen in a post 9/11 America.





The Journey to Frankfurt, Germany

The final destination in this journey would take me to Frankfurt, Germany which is home to a large community of German-Muslims, one of the largest in Europe and one which I recently reached out to. It's here where I plan to continue the discussion with both Muslim-Germans who live as second or third generation German citizens and also those who have only recently arrived as Muslim immigrants or refugees from the Middle East. I believe this will be the most challenging part of this journey, but also the part that may be most enlightening and enriching.





Global Community

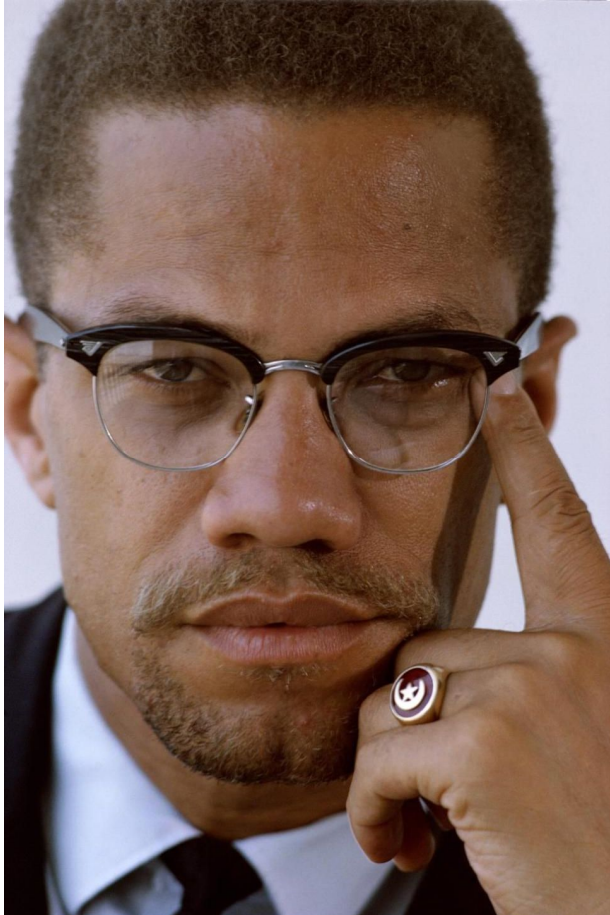
As stated in my introduction, I believe we as Non-Muslims share much more in common with Muslims in our values, our ethics, our compassion and our love of family, community and country than is largely perceived, however it remains only an opinion I hold without substantive evidence or example. My only personal experience to date's been limited to just few Muslim friends and it's difficult to make a convincing case when drawing from so few personal connections. Therefore it's through this journey and these more diverse personal dialogs that I hope to explore and substantiate these long held beliefs so that I might share with others who possess in their hearts and souls the desire for a more peaceful world community. More important is that I might someday change the minds of some who see Muslims as too different or too threatening to accept as close neighbors and friends in our local and global community.

This journey which began nearly four months ago, has already been life changing for me as I now realize that I as an Evangelical Christian am part of a much larger spiritual world than I previously believed. My hope is that it may also be life changing for those I meet along the journey and those I share it with afterwards.

I alone can't change the world, but if in this endeavor I might change the minds of few, or maybe even just one, then perhaps that's a worthwhile beginning in hope of **building cultural bridges**.

Prominent American Muslims

Social Activism and Politics



Malcolm X

Civil rights activist, public speaker and Black Muslim minister

Edina Lekovic

Communications Director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council

Farah Pandith

Official advisor to President Obama on Muslim matters

Zalmay Khalilzad

Former UN ambassador with President George W. Bush

Nihad Awad

National Executive Director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations

Rep. André Carson

Congressman from Indiana

Robert D. Crane

Former foreign policy advisor; author

C. Jack Ellis

Former mayor of Macon, Georgia

Rep. Keith Ellison

First Muslim congressman from Minnesota

Ibrahim Hooper

National Communications Director for the Council on American-Islamic Relations

Mansoor Ijaz

Hedge fund manager and venture capitalist involved in Pakistan–United States

Zalmay Khalilzad

Former US Ambassador to the United Nations; former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq and Afghanistan

Zainab Salbi

Co-founder and president for Women for Women International

Betty Shabazz

Civil rights activist and educator; widow of Malcolm X

James Yee

Former U.S. Army chaplain with the rank of Captain

Elias Zerhouni

Director, National Institutes of Health

Mohammed Hameeduddin

Mayor of Teaneck, N.J.

Amer Ahmad

Comptroller, Chicago

Armed Forces / First Responders



Capt. Humayun Saqib Muazzam Khan – US Army

Posthumously awarded a Purple Heart and Bronze Star, Remembered by his parents Khizr & Ghazala Khan at the 2016 Democratic Convention

Salman Hamdani

First responder on 9/11

Kareem Rashad Sultan Khan – US Army

Recipient of the Bronze Star and Purple Heart who died while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.



XPLORE 2016

Business



Mohamed A. El-Erian

CEO of PIMCO, manager of over \$1 trillion in global assets

Fuad El-Hibri

CEO of Emergent BioSolutions

Malik M. Hasan

A pioneer in the field of HMOs

Shahid Khan

Owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars NFL

Abdul Malik Mujahid

President of Sound Vision and community activist

Safi Qureshey

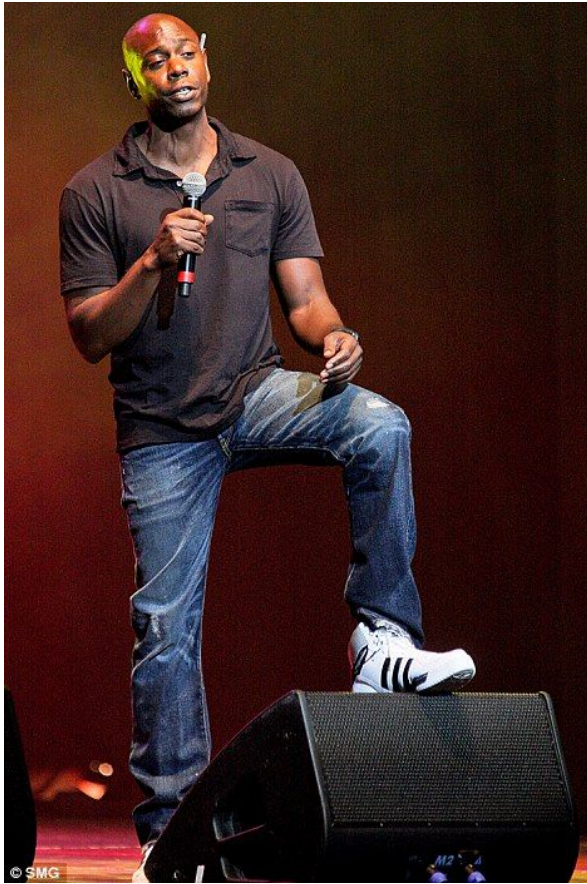
A leader in PC component manufacturing

Farooq Kathwari

CEO of Ethan Allen Global, Inc.



Entertainment



Ahmed Ahmed

Standup comedian, actor

Mohammed Amer

Standup comedian

Maz Jobrani

Standup comedian, actor

Aasif Mandvi

Comedian, actor

Hasan Minhaj

Comedian

Preacher Moss

Standup comedian, comedy writer

Zahra Noorbakhsh

Comedian, writer, actor

Dean Obeidallah

Standup comedian

Azhar Usman

Standup comedian

Maysoon Zayid

Standup comedian, actress

Dave Chappelle

Standup comedian, converted in 1998

Film

Nabil Abou-Harb

Writer and director of Arab in America

Shohreh Aghdashloo

Academy Award-nominated actress

Ellyn Burstyn

Academy Award Winning Actress

Moustapha Akkad

Film director, producer

Lewis Arquette

Film actor, writer, and producer

Sayed Badreya

Actor, filmmaker

Saïd Taghmaoui

Actor



Rima Fakih

Actress

Music



Mos Def

Rapper, initially joined the Nation of Islam before converting to Islam

Ahmad Jamal

Jazz pianist

Akil

Rapper, formerly of the alternative hip-hop group Jurassic

Ahmet Ertegün

Songwriter and founder of Atlantic Records

Akon

R&B and hip-hop artist

Ali Shaheed Muhammad

Producer, DJ and rapper, formerly of A Tribe Called Quest

Art Blakey

Jazz drummer and bandleader

B.G. Knocc Out

Rapper from Compton, California, converted to Islam in 1999

Big Daddy Kane

Rapper

Busta Rhymes

Hip-hop artist and rapper

Casey Kasem

Druze radio personality known for his top forty DJ format

Everlast

Rapper from the Irish-American hip-hop group House of Pain

Freeway

Rapper, Sunni Muslim

Ghostface Killah

Rapper, member of the hip-hop group the Wu-Tang Clan

Ice Cube

Rapper and producer

Immortal Technique

Rapper and social activist

Jermaine Jackson

Singer, bass guitarist

Lupe Fiasco

Rapper; Sunni Muslim

Rakim

5 percenter, rapper and former member of the hip-hop duo Eric B. & Rakim

Scarface

Rapper

Snoop Dogg

Rapper

T-Pain

Singer, rapper

Vinnie Paz

Rapper in the hip-hop group Jedi Mind Tricks

Yusef Lateef

Jazz musician and Grammy Award winner

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Television



Mara Brock Akil

Screenwriter, producer

Rizwan Manji

Actor

Isaiah Mustafa

Actor

Kamran Pasha

Screenwriter, producer

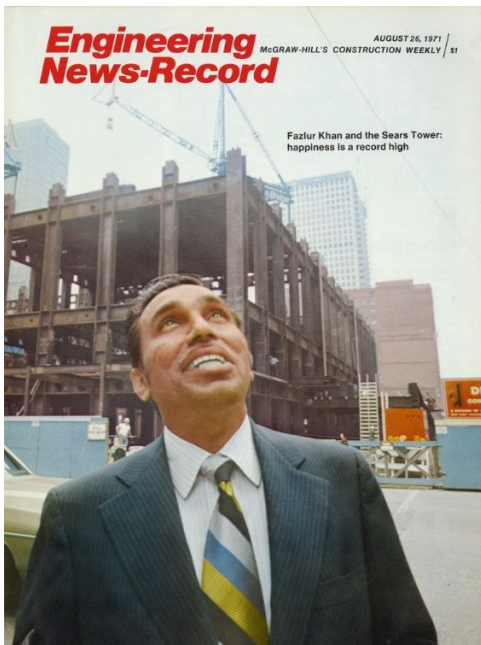
Iqbal Theba

Actor

Dr. Mehmet Oz

Medical doctor, talk show host

Science & Engineering



Ayub K. Ommaya

Neurosurgeon, inventor of the Ommaya reservoir

Ahmed Zewail

Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry, 1999

Fazlur Khan

Structural engineer (designed the Sears Tower, John Hancock Center)

Writing / News Media

Reza Aslan

Author, religious scholar

Mona Eltahawy

Columnist

Yahiya Emerick

Author

Ayman Mohyeldin

Al-Jazeera English journalist

Stephen Schwartz

Journalist

Michael Wolfe

Journalist

Fareed Zakaria

Journalist CNN



Boxing

Bernard Hopkins

Former Middleweight and Light Heavyweight world champion

Eddie Mustafa Muhammad

Former Light Heavyweight Champion

Matthew Saad Muhammad

Former Light Heavyweight Champion

Dwight Muhammad Qawi

Former Light Heavyweight and Cruiserweight Champion

Hasim Rahman

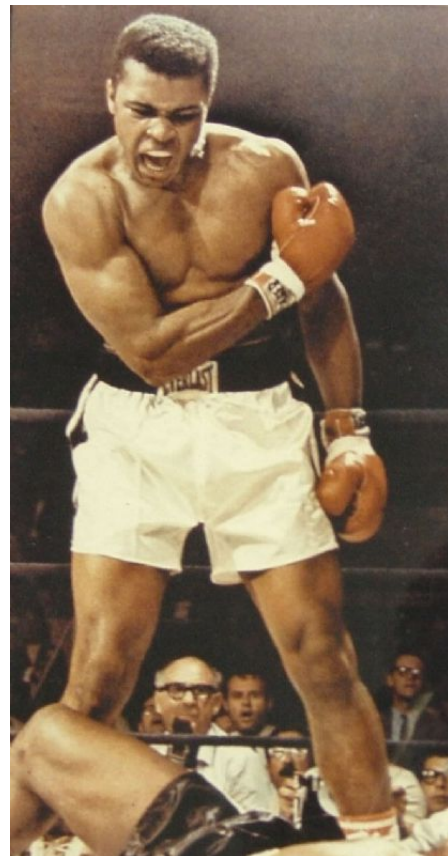
Former Heavyweight champion

Mike Tyson

Undisputed Heavyweight Champion in 1987, converted in 1994

Muhammad Ali

Became a member of the Nation of Islam in 1964



Basketball

Shaquille O'Neal

DeSagana Diop

Senegalese basketball player for the Charlotte Bobcats

Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf

Former player for Denver Nuggets, converted in 1991

Shareef Abdur-Rahim

Retired player, named NBA All-Star in 2001–02 season

Hassan Adams

Drafted by and played for the New Jersey Nets

Larry Johnson

Retired player, played for the Charlotte Hornets and New York Knicks

Nazr Mohammed

Player for the Charlotte Bobcats

Mehmet Okur

Turkish player of the Utah Jazz

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Converted to Islam in 1968



Football

Ahmad Rashad

NFL player turned sportscaster

Hamza Abdullah

Safety for the Cleveland Browns

Husain Abdullah

Safety for the Minnesota Vikings

Oday Aboushi

Guard, drafted by the New York Jets in 2013

Az-Zahir Hakim

Wide receiver formerly for the St. Louis Rams

Ryan Harris

Offensive tackle for the Pittsburgh Steelers

Abdul Hodge

Linebacker for the Carolina Panthers

Ahmad Rashad

Former wide receiver for Minnesota Vikings

Ephraim Salaam

Offensive tackle for the Detroit Lions

Muhammad Wilkerson

Defensive end for the New York Jets

Usama Young

Free safety for the New Orleans Saints

Fouad Zaban

Football Coach, Fordson High School,
Dearborn, Michigan



Note to Reader:

This short list of accomplished Individuals represents just a small segment of American Muslims all across the United States in all sectors of our society.

XPLORE 2016

Dedication

This amazing journey is dedicate to one of my very best friends, Homayon Moaven, who was killed in October 2015 by a drunk driver just blocks from his home in Palm Springs, California.

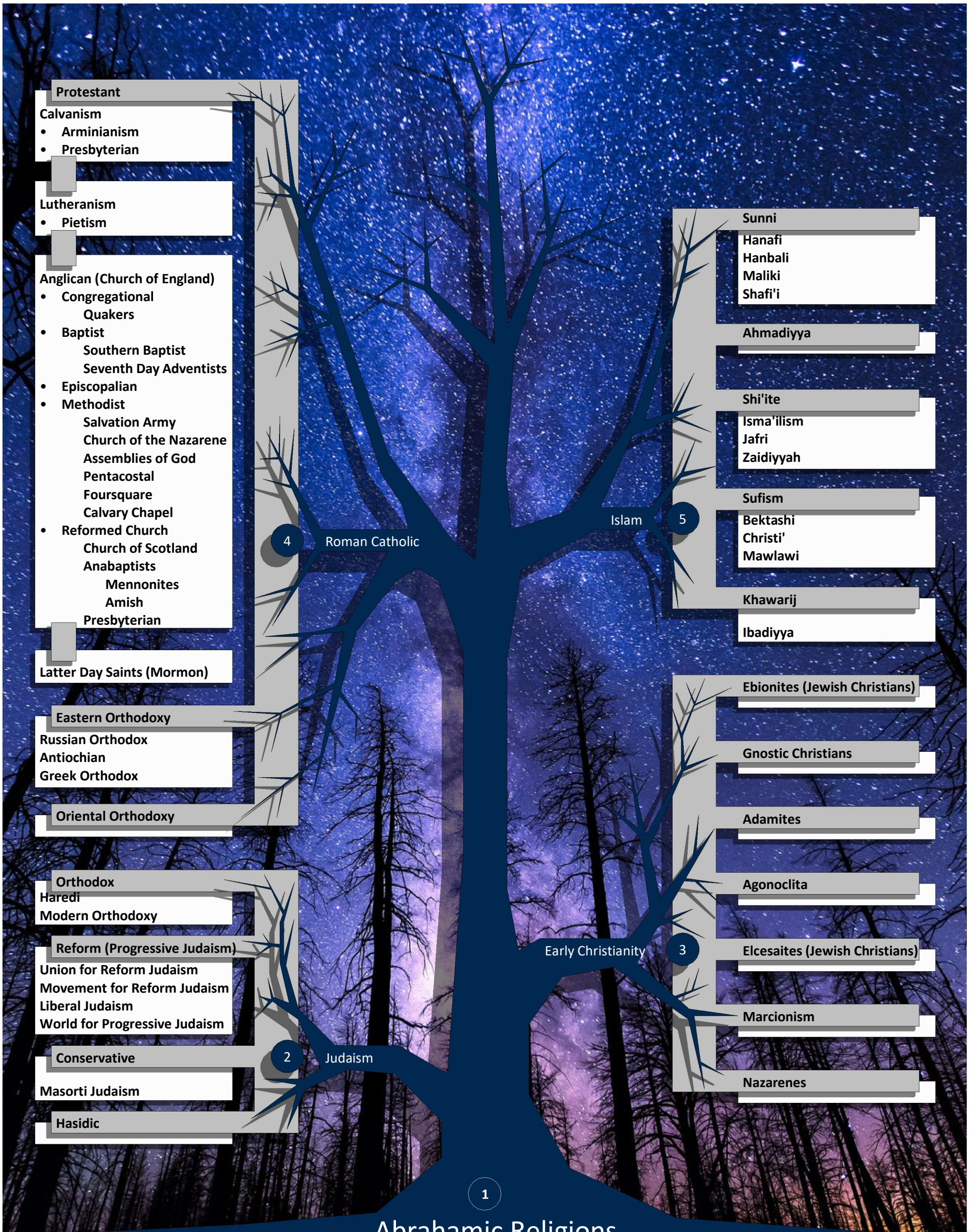
I'd just spoken with him the day before about helping me with my home remodel, and was in shock when I learned of his death. One never knows what to say at a time like that, except that the world was a much better place for having him in our lives.

We are all blessed by those whose lives have touched ours, and by those whose lives we ourselves have been a part of. Homayon helped me during a time when no one else could or would. It could be said I still have my home because he helped me by providing the means to do so during the recent recession. But more than that, he was simply my good friend whom I'll miss very much. His kindness, his compassion, his eternal optimism, but most of all I'll miss the sound of his infectious laughter.

I know without a doubt that if he were here today, he'd want to be a part of this great endeavor and I probably would've asked him to join me. I know he'll be with me in spirit.

Merci, Homayon





- Abrahamic religions, emphasizing and tracing their common origin to the tribal patriarch Abraham. The major Abrahamic religions in chronological order of founding are:
 - Judaism (late second millennium BCE)
 - Christianity (first century CE)
 - Islam (seventh century CE)
- Judaism is an ancient monotheistic religion, with the Torah as its foundational text (the Torah is part of the Hebrew Bible).
- Christianity is founded in the belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Messiah.
- When the Roman Emperor Constantine reigned, Christianity began to transition to the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. During this time the Emperor commissioned the Bible.
- According to tradition, the Islamic prophet Muhammad began receiving divine revelations delivered through the angel Gabriel, which would later form the Quran