

Serving the Community

By L. C. Shabazz

"A good name is better than gold," especially when that name identifies its bearer as a servant of God and man.

Imam Abdul Karim Hasan has had a good name, in one variation or another, since birth, and although he told *Bilalian News*, "The only life I have known for the past 20 years has been an Islamic life," he has been the proud bearer of an Islamic name since his birth in Camden, N.J., in September, 1931.

He first told this story in 1964 to Master Elijah Muhammad (peace be upon him). In essence, his story is a family saga.

In 1964, at a leadership conference following one of the large Muslim meetings, held annually in late February, Abd El Karim was amongst a group of Muslim ministers (now called Imams) who were to meet Master Elijah Muhammad.

Scanning a list of names of ministers he did not know, the Master was struck by the name Abd El Karim (pronounced Car-rim). He called on the tall, long-limbed man to explain his name, its significance and how he came about it.

For 15 nervous minutes, he recalled a saga of a family's search for a belief.

"My mother was an active campaigner against injustice and against the ill-treatment of our people such as denial of rights—so forth and so on.

"MOM": FORMER GARVEYITE

"She was so active, she was a member of the Marcus Garvey movement in 1929 and '30. Even before I was born she was a member of the Marcus Garvey movement, and she used to march in the parades in Philadelphia, Hasan stated.

The Marcus Garvey movement, or Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), incorporated in 1918, was a strong Bilalian movement which advocated self-pride, unity and the return to Africa.

This "Back-to-Africa" movement during its prime, unified millions of Bilalians throughout the United States and the Caribbean.

Continuing, Hasan recalls, "By the time I was born, my uncle (Clarence Smith), who was also a member of the Marcus Garvey movement, had become captain of the UNIA.

"When he found out my mother was pregnant, he asked her if he could name the baby if it was a boy. So when I was born, he named me, and he gave me a Muslim name. He gave me Abd El Karim."

Actually the uncle had named him after Abd El Karim, a famous Moroccan freedom fighter who fought valiantly against the French during Morocco's independence struggles.

Born into a family of seven girls and four boys, the story of this Imam is a story of a family's search for salvation through mass movements.

"The main moving force in the direction of mass movements," he says, "was my mother. Most of my family, especially on my mother's side, have been active in mass movements."

Today, almost every member of his family on his mother's side, are active in the World Community of Islam in the West.

One brother, Abdul Majjed Karim Hasan, is an Imam in Connecticut. His mother, Sis. Amida, still active, lives in Wilmington, N.C.

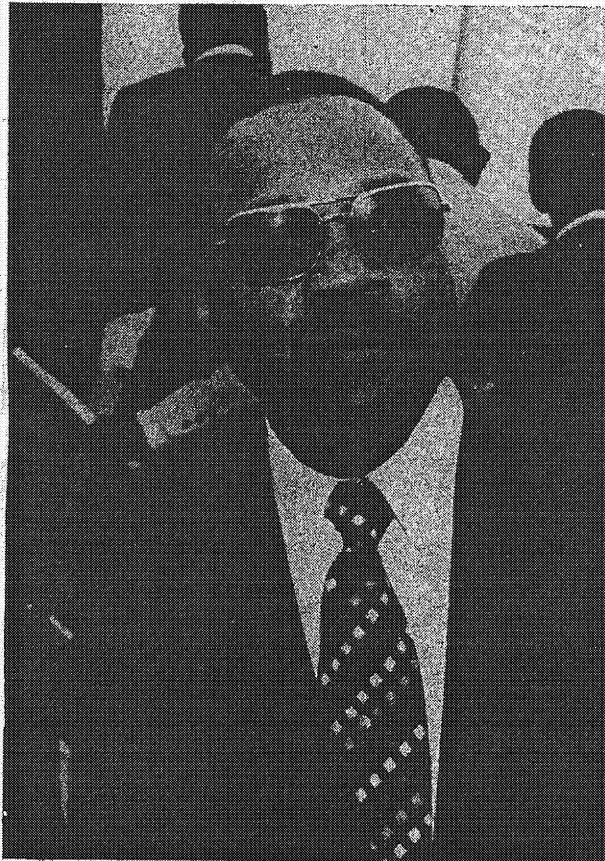
When the Imam was just a lot the family moved South and lost contact

with UNIA. About 40 years later the family returned to the North, this time settling in Hartford, Conn.

It was Sis. Amida who led the family to Islam and other worthwhile endeavors. The road to the mosque took many courses.

Amida means strength or strong support in Arabic. The name was given her by Chief Imam W.D. Muhammad when he heard this story. "She was really the strength or strong supporter of our family. My father was never a joiner," Imam Hasan recalls.

He remembers that his mother even bought a ticket on the famed and ill-



Imam Abdul Karim Hasan

fated "Black Star Line," a UNIA-owned shipping concern established to transport Bilalians back to Africa.

UNIA did not exist in Hartford, so Sis. Amida's allegiance to "blackness" was stifled until she met a member of the Moorish Science Temple, and later joined that movement.

"We stayed in the Moorish Americans until one night my mother was contacted by some more members of the Moorish Americans who had heard Islam, which at that time was just a 'house teaching' in Hartford.

"Malcolm X was coming down from New York to teach in the house in Hartford. The Moorish Americans had invited him.

"When my mother heard it she accepted right away. But her new talk was so radical at first, I told momma she was crazy."

Abd El Karim reluctantly went with his mother to the Muslim meeting to challenge Minister Malcolm, or so he thought.

As it turned out, he liked the minister's message so much, he was the first person to jump up and join the movement that night. That was 20 years ago in March 1956.

Within a month, he was appointed squad leader in the militarized, all-male unit known as the Fruit of Islam (FOI). Before long, although he had never joined the U.S. armed services, he became a lieutenant, then a captain, and eventually he joined the ministry.

...FOUND HIS HOME

Coincidentally, the same building used by the Muslims was shared by the Moorish Scientists, who often tried to get Abd El Karim to recant, but he had found his home.

As assistant minister he taught all over the East Coast area: New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Connecticut.

He did this for three or four years straight, until one night he fell asleep at the wheel while driving on a Connecticut highway.

This near fateful accident didn't curb his activities, however, he just decided to move to New Haven. There, as minister, he helped establish Mosque Nos. 40 and 41.

Today, many of the mosques in Connecticut were established through his tireless efforts to propagate the Islamic faith.

On Nov. 3, 1971, Mr. Muhammad sent him to L.A. on a 10-day trial basis, and he's been here ever since. Not only was he appointed head of the large L.A. Mosque, but he was appointed Supervisor of all Mosques in the Western U.S.

"We have had all the exposure that any mosque can have. And we have grown from a small building that can house only 500, to a new building capable of an attendance as high as 1,500," he says willingly, but pleading for shared credit.