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MUSLIM AMERICANS FOR COMPASSION



MAC Interviews: Malvin 'Bud' Ridener Missionary and COVID-19 Survivor

Most of his friends call him 'Bud,' but Malvin Ridener had plenty of time to earn his new pseudonym: 'The Miracle Man.' The nurses caring for Ridener on the COVID unit knew his odds were slim. "The nurses really didn't think I was going to make it. They were just trying to save my life," Ridener recalled during a phone interview in early December. With a little luck and a lot of faith, he pulled through and was able to spend the holidays with his loved ones.

These days, Ridener is relaxing in the Kentucky home he shares with his wife and grandson, still recovering from a 67-day stay in the hospital where even his caretakers weren't sure of the outcome. We are very happy to share this interview between Muslim Americans for Compassion writer Aaron Burch and Mr.

Ridener.

AB: Could we start by discussing your ministry? How long have you served?

MR: I was a pastor in Mt. Washington for 31 years. But, there came a point in my walk with God where I felt like I needed to do something more. An opportunity arise for me to take a trip to Panama. I went down there for eight days, preaching at different churches at night and speaking on the radio during the day.

When I came back, I got an invitation to go to El Salvador. After some uncertainty, I went. It felt like just what God wanted me to do. Then I was blessed to go to Spain, India, New Zealand and Mexico. My focus soon became Central America, especially El Salvador. There were so many needs, so many people hurting.

I met a family who lived in, well, the best way to describe it is a cardboard shack. They had 12 children. I began to raise money for them to build a house. They didn't know what it was to have anything in life, and no hope for it. It really touched my heart to help and be able to minister to these people.

AB: What other projects were you involved in?

MR: The next project was digging a well. There were 93 families up in the mountains who had no water. They would walk an hour to the bottom of the mountain to buy water and carry it back. I told the men with me that we had to do something to help these people.

We ran into a lot of snags, but we were dedicated to making that well a success. We had to go 600 feet down to hit water, and as a result it cost more than \$30,000 to get that well put in. But, it changed the lives of those people. Now they have access to all the water they want.

That's what I've been doing over the last seven or eight years. I don't miss pastoring, and I still minister from time to time. My wife and I attend a church in Elizabethtown, and they were kind enough to include me on their preaching staff.

AB: I heard you recently overcame COVID-19. I'm glad to hear you're doing much better. Is there anything you'd like to share about your experience.

MR: The church I go to, we practice social distancing. We wear masks and all. But, the virus still got to us. I went to a home meeting for one of the ministers. There were 15 people in that meeting. 14 contracted COVID including me. The only person who wore a mask didn't get the virus. Because I had COVID, my wife and grandson both got the virus too. It didn't affect them the way it did me, but they still had much to overcome.

I was admitted to the hospital on August 30. Nurses brought me into the COVID unit, they were covered head to toe. They did bloodwork on me, and I remember the doctor saying, "You're dehydrated. You have food poisoning and pneumonia, in addition to COVID." The next thing I remember is several people working on me. They wanted to put me on a ventilator. I was getting just a little oxygen in my lungs and, for at least two weeks, I was really in a struggle.

AB: Is there any advice you would share with those who are struggling with the Coronavirus?

MR: I'd like to be an encouragement to others. I was there, at the lowest point, and I survived. Don't give up and don't give in.

When I was in the COVID unit, I don't know how many days, I was laying there and all of a sudden I was taken somewhere else. I thought I died. That's really what I thought. But the Lord spoke to me and said, "You've been a man of the Bible. Where is your Bible now?" Why would God talk to me?

He was trying to tell me that the book, The Bible, is not the important part. Knowing God is what's important. There are 7.4 billion people in the world right now, and God has a purpose and a plan for each of us. Only the Lord could do that. It's beyond our comprehension.

I responded to the Lord and said, "There's no time or dimension that could define you. One book, whether it's the Bible, the Quran or otherwise, could never define all there is to God. They lead us to God and a relationship with Him.

The Lord cares about everyone. I mean no disparagement to the Bible or the Quran. But, a relationship with God, that's what is eternal. All we must do is believe and its possible. As Jesus said, those who seek will find. When we face eternity, and I thought I was there, the only thing that's going to matter is: "Do we know the Lord, and does he know us?"

Death is a part of life. None of us can escape it. We didn't choose the family we would be born in or what race we are. We're simply alive and in this world. It's the same when we're getting ready to leave. I had no fear because I was talking to God. A lot of people may not believe that, but I was.

AB: Can you tell me about the last few months? What did the recovery process look like?

MR: I was at the point of death, truly. There was nothing I could do but trust in the Lord. Coming home was my goal. I was in the hospital 67 days, some days laying there feeling like a slab of meat. But I fought my way back. The nurses called me 'The Miracle Man.' They really didn't think I was going to make it. They were just trying to save my life.

Once I felt better, I started going to Fraizer Rehab. They helped me, and they continue to help me. Finally, my family came and picked me up at the hospital. It felt so good to be outside. Thank God I'm better now.

AB: How are you and your family doing now?

MR: My wife and grandson are doing well. My wife struggled with anxiety from COVID for a little while. The virus can do that to you. But everyone is better now than we were just a few months. Our church was very supportive. They brought food to my wife and grandson

and tried to keep them encouraged.

We're all just thankful. My goal is to get back to working in the ministry. God called me to be a servant and help others. That's what I want to get back to doing. It bothers me that I've been so dependent on others to help me do things we take for granted. I'm still getting my oxygen levels up. I want to get stronger. I want to help others and pay something back. That's my goal.

Thank you so much Mr. Ridener for sharing your brave story with Muslim Americans for Compassion. We're very grateful to have the opportunity to speak with you, and we wish your family all the best going forward.



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