



1001 Inventions in New York City

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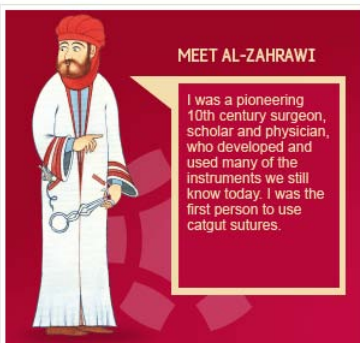


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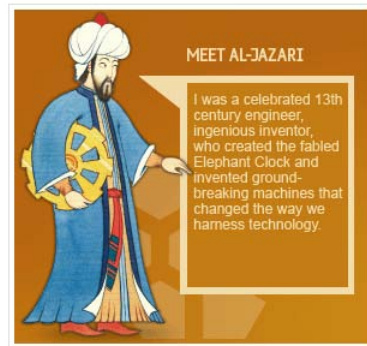
As I was trudging through the snow piled parking lot, I viewed the groups of teachers and children lined up in front of the Hall of Science Museum in Queens, New York.



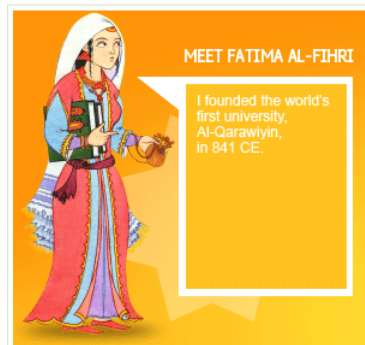
Amidst the usual crowd, there were Muslim women with brightly colored scarves waving like the United Nations' Flags. I gave salaam to all my beautiful sisters and waved to the children. "Which school are you from?" I inquired. "Al-Islamia from Brooklyn," "Jamaica Muslim Center from Queens," "Hamza Academy from Long Island." *Mash-Allah!* They were teachers from three different Islamic Schools and from all tri-borough areas of NY! All of them were waiting to see the **1001 Inventions exhibition**, showcasing the long forgotten scientific legacy of Muslim Civilization. You could feel the sense of dignified pride in the students that they would finally see Muslim role models that ranged from scientists, explorers, thinkers, mathematicians, physicists, astronomers and scholars far more than what was offered in their science and social studies textbooks.



I have to really honor the Hall of Science Museum to allow this opportunity to bring Multi-cultural perspective and allow different cultures to show case their history and its contributions. As soon as we walked in, we were greeted with a sign of "1001 Inventions" lighting at the front entrance as well as the posted figures of ancient Muslim Scientists. I was grateful to see that they even offered a prayer room next to the exhibitions.



The exhibition had several different minaret structures which were divided into different zones (home, school, flight, hospitals etc.) that represented the different types of inventions that led other technological inventions we use today. In the school zones, students rushed to touch buttons that light up the angles in a series of numerals, revealing the reason why we write the numbers the way we do today. In the home zone, they watched a video on Ibn Al-Haytham and how he discovered how the eyes work which lead to the idea of 'camera obscura'. Some students went to view the admirer ship that a Chinese Muslim Zheng who made the world's largest fleet, while other children admired the large scale reproduction world map made by Moroccan scholars Al-Idrisi in the World Zone. I especially love the lit up poster of pictures and names of scholars from all faiths working together to advance science technology during the height of the Muslim Civilization.



My little group of Muslim girls seemed to be wowing a video of Merriam Ai-Lilliyah. They were no older than 4 years old, but found a new super star besides Dora the Explorer or Princess Cinderella. They kept pushing one another to hold the phone and listen to how she constructed astrolabes for the ruler of Aleppo in Northern Syria in the 10th century. Whether they understood it or not was not the point. They were just excited to see a beautiful woman in a colorful traditional Muslim scarf holding the scientific tool that she created. I asked them which Muslim scientist they liked the most, and they all shouted "Merriam-I want to be an astronomer like Merriam!"

When we were in, we sat down to watch a 15 minute movie "The Library of Secrets", and Oscar winning actor Ben Kingsley plays a mysterious librarian who takes the school children to an enlightening journey to meet different scientists in the Muslims Golden Era of the Middle Ages. Even little Pre-K and Kindergartners were sitting quietly enchanted by Aladdin and Genie like figures explaining their contributions. They especially liked Abbas Ibn Firnaas who made an attempt to fly but ... did not land too well!



The highlight of the exhibition was the large Elephant water clock invented by engineer Al-Jazari from the 12th century.



I walked out of the Museum feeling "enlightened" that Dark Ages were not so dark after all, and there were more tales than the crusades, war, and blood shed in this time period. This exhibition really lit a passion in me to study the Muslim Civilization and all the famous scholars of all faiths. Maybe we can learn from this golden period of Islam to build a better inter faith world-wide peace through Science and Education. Maybe it would not be so bad to take an astronomy course although I'm not too keen on math-and yes...Merriam Al-Illiyah is my new heroine!

For more information on the 1001 exhibition, you can go to <http://www.1001inventions.com>.

For the museum trip and fees you can go to <http://www.nysci.org/visit/events/1001>