

## **A Biography of International Intrigue**

*On Saturday, I briefly chatted with Shaikh Abdullah el-Faisal, the controversial Islamic cleric, and his agent, Abu Nidal.*

Monday | June 11, 2007

Paul H. Williams

*Jamaica Gleaner*

They did not divulge much because they were yet to speak with the *Shura*, the executive and consultative body of the Islamic Council of Jamaica.

Today, his Story gives you a synopsis of the biography of a man whose story is one of international intrigue, but was virtually unknown to many Jamaicans until recently, when he returned to Jamaica, after spending four and a half years in a British jail.

He was born Trevor William Forrest, in Bluefields, Westmoreland, on the 10th of September 1963. At the age of six, his family moved to Point, St. James, where he spent the rest of his childhood.

He attended Springfield All-Age School and Maldon Secondary School from 1975-1980, where, as deputy head boy, he had an excellent relationship with then principal, S. M. Buddle.

On graduation day, at Maldon, he received prizes for English and business education, his favourite subjects.

He said his business education teacher, Jolly McFarlane, introduced him to the Islamic faith.

When he was 16, he accepted the Islam faith, because to him the Islamic concept of God was the most “articulate and profound”. The belief in one God (monotheism) is fundamental to Islam, and he embraced it.

Shortly after leaving Maldon in 1980, he assumed the name Abdullah el-Faisal, which means ‘Servant of God, the Good Judge’. The name was legally changed by deed poll in 1983.

Before that, in 1981, he went on a Saudi Arabian Government-sponsored six-week crash course in Islamic and Arabic studies, in Trinidad. He was taught the skills of being an imam, the Islamic equivalent of a pastor.

## **Further Studies**

In 1982, el-Faisal went to Guyana for further studies in Arabic and Islam. After a year in Guyana, he returned to Jamaica, where he spent another twelve months.

Determined to know everything about his faith, in November 1984 el-Faisal left for Riyadh, the administrative capital of Saudi Arabia, on a Saudi Government scholarship to pursue Arabic and Islamic studies, at the Imam Muhammad University.

He was the first Jamaican to leave directly to study to become a *shaikh* in Saudi Arabia. Before him, Jamaican-born Bilal Philips migrated to Canada at an early age, and went to Saudi Arabia on a Canadian passport. Philips obtained a doctorate degree in Islamic theology, and was instrumental in helping el-Faisal to get his scholarship.

Abdullah spent eight years in Saudi Arabia studying, but during breaks he would visit London, New York and the Caribbean. Upon completion of his studies in 1992, he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in theology and has been a shaikh since then.

That same year, he came to Jamaica for a short stay and left thereafter for the United Kingdom.

There, el-Faisal lectured at universities from London to Glasgow. He spoke to mixed audiences outside of the mosque, but only to Muslims inside the mosque.

## **Educate Muslims**

He said he spoke on 150 different topics, details of which will come at another time. His objectives were and still are to educate Muslims and to spread orthodox Islamic beliefs.

Shaikh el-Faisal speaks fluent Arabic and perfect English, and has been to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the holiest city of Islam, on 10 minor pilgrimages (*umras*) and a major one (the *hajj*). An *umrah* (*umrah* in English) is a lesser pilgrimage made by Muslims to Mecca, which may be undertaken any time of the year. Muslims are expected to make the *hajj*, the greater pilgrimage, which lasts five days, at least once, if they can afford to.

As it relates to the word, 'sheikh', el-Faisal said it was an improper designation as it actually means, "an Arab playboy who spends lavishly on women". A 'shaikh' is an Islamic scholar and he said that is exactly what he is. He is married to a Pakistani, and they have a five-year-old daughter. The cleric has been to 30 countries and he said the reception he got when he returned to Jamaica recently was the warmest, even from the local authorities.

And, there is more to come.