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'My Name is Bilal' embraces religion

By Kim Hone-McMahan; Beacon Journal staff writer

Bilal hid behind a tree and watched as a bully tugged on his sister's head scarf. He wished more than ever that his family still lived in Chicago. At his old school, there were lots of Muslim students. At this new place, there seemed to be none.

My Name is Bilal (Boyds Mills Press, \$15.95) is a tale about a boy who wants to fit in so badly he hides his heritage.

"Al is my middle name," he stammers, correcting a teacher's pronunciation. "My first name is Bill."

After class, the teacher, who is also Muslim, gives the boy a book about Bilal Ibn Rabah, the first person to give the Muslim call to prayer.

The tale inspires the boy and the next time a bully teases his sister, Bilal has enough courage to rush to her side. He tells Scott that his name is Bilal and that he and his family are Muslims. And rather than hold a grudge, he invites Scott to play basketball.

When the game is over, one of the older boys walks off the court. When Bilal inquires where he is going, a teammate said, "He's Muslim. He always prays in the afternoon."

The world doesn't seem so big after all.

Author Asma Mobin-Uddin is a pediatrician who lives in Columbus. She has served on the executive committee of her Islamic Center and as a vice president of the Ohio chapter of a national Muslim advocacy organization.

The hardback book, for ages 6 and up, is beautifully illustrated by Barara Kiwak.