

Skateboarder an overnight sensation after rescuing Quran

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(RNS) At the end of a summer characterized by unprecedented levels of Islamophobia, Muslim Americans and their allies have found an expected reason to smile: Jake Isom, a skateboarder with a rat-tail from Amarillo, Texas.

Last Saturday (Sept. 18), Isom, 23, snatched a kerosene-soaked Koran from a grill in a city park before David Grisham, head of a local Christian group known as Repent Amarillo, could set it afire.

Isom's telling of the story to a local news station went viral, receiving close to 300,000 views on YouTube.

"I snuck-up behind him and took his Quran. He said something about burning a Quran, and I was like `Dude, you HAVE no Quran, and ran off," Isom, recounts in the news clip in an accent best described as "slacker."

Since then, Isom, who said he doesn't have any "set beliefs," has been immortalized on The Daily Show, a tribute page on Facebook and on T-shirts. He has fulfilled a long-held ambition to appear in High Times magazine, while a Google search of "Dude, you have no Quran," turns up dozens of hits .

To Muslims and non-Muslims, Isom has become an overnight folk hero, a modern-day blend of Jeff Spicoli (the stoned surfer from "Fast Times At Ridgemont High") and Saladin (the Muslim leader who fought the Crusaders).

"What's great about this is that it's coming from Joe America," said Shahed Amanullah, editor of AltMuslim.com, a web magazine. "What he did,

and the way people responded, gives me more faith in America than anything any politician or media celebrity could do."

"I wish every discontented Muslim overseas could see this," said Amanullah. "It shows that Americans aren't ignorant, that they're not out to get Muslims. This guy, he's helping Muslims."

Not everyone applauded Isom. At the conservative website FreeRepublic.com, commentators said Isom should be jailed for stealing Grisham's copy of the Quran. "Yet this MTV generation would stand by and let people burn American flags," said one commenter.

For his part, Isom said he would do it again.

"This is America, and we're not supposed to be like that," he said in an interview. "I don't care if it's a Quran or a Bible, I would stop anyone from doing either, because we don't stand for that kind of religious bigotry here, and I want to keep it that way."