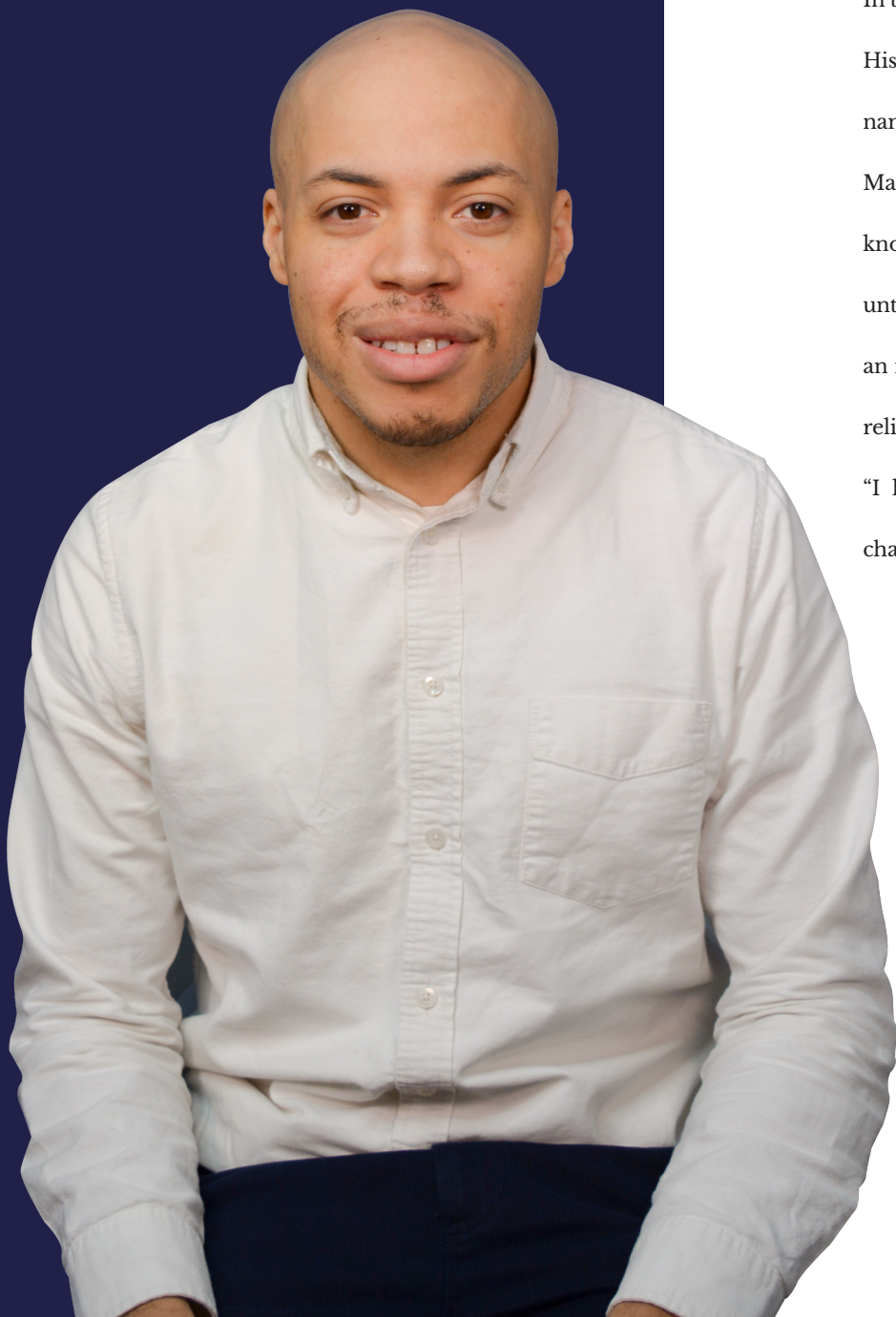


*A series
profiling
your fellow
Routematchers.*

by Laura Lee Huttenbach



Kahlil Ansari

Support Specialist

Kahlil Ansari, whose father is a poet, was named after Kahlil Gibran, author of the *The Prophet*. “I was happy to be named after someone who is so deep and wise,” says Kahlil. His last name has a story, too. In the 1950s, his grandfather was living in the Bronx. His last name was Carson, but he changed the family name to Ansari when he followed the words of Malcolm X and joined the Nation of Islam. “I didn’t know much about that part of my family’s history until recently,” says Kahlil. Today his grandfather is an imam who preaches harmony between different religions. “His beliefs have evolved a lot,” says Kahlil. “I like that he believed in something enough to change his life and better himself.” >

Q&A with Kahlil Ansari

Q: Where did you grow up?

A. I was born in Schenectady, which is a small town in up-state New York. When I was fourteen, my mom and I moved to Powder Springs, Georgia to be closer to the rest of my family there.

Q: What did you like to do in school?

A. I was in the orchestra. I was really heavy into the viola. I also used to shoot home movies and short films with my group of friends. That was a lot of fun.

Q: What kind of movies did you shoot?

A. They were mostly parody movies. Star Wars parodies. Superhero parodies. Or we would just make up our own characters. Once we did a little heist home video. In college, I made a fifteen-minute biopic on Basquiat, who was a graffiti artist.

Q: What was it about Basquiat that struck you?

A. Usually when you grow up and hear about art, you think of like old school artists like Van Gogh and Degas and Monet. But Basquiat was this modern artist who lived in the city [Brooklyn]. He wanted to make his art accessible to people. Not just those who were upper-class and fancy and had education. He did his art on the streets. But he was also Andy Warhol's protégé, so it was really interesting to see him walk between those worlds of highbrow and the streets. He's fascinating.

Q: Do you have a YouTube channel for all your films? Where does your work live?

A. It lives on my hard drive for now. Maybe one day I'll show it to the world.

Q: What did you study in college?

A. Spanish. It was something I really liked. I wanted to learn a new language and be more worldly.



Q: How much do you speak Spanish now?

A. Not as much as I'd like. At work, almost never. But I'll watch stuff in Spanish when I get home. I read in Spanish. Do you know the writer Pablo Neruda? He's from Chile. I like how he puts words together. In college, I did a semester in Costa Rica and lived with a host family.

Q: It's easy to make mistakes when you're learning a new language. Did you have any memorable errors?

A. There are some cognates between English and Spanish, but there are a few that you think are cognates, and they're basically traps. Take the word "embarrassed." You'd think that the Spanish word would be embarazada. So I told my host family that I was embarazada about something. But embarazada means pregnant in Spanish. For us, it's an easy mistake. But to people who don't know English, it's a really strange thing to say you're pregnant.

Q: What is your favorite book and why?

A. I read a lot of nonfiction. The last great one I read was *Manchild in the Promised Land* [by Claude Brown]. It's set in Harlem in the 1950s and depicts what life was like then. What's most interesting to me is how you can live in a certain geographical area and how someone next door to you can be in a completely different world.



Q. Do you have a strategy on how to bridge those worlds?

A. I ask a lot of questions. If I meet someone from a different place or country, I'll say, "What's it like where you're from? What are the biggest differences between there and here?"

Q. How did you come to work at Routematch?

A. I was tutoring kids in Spanish and English and doing some consulting for IBM. I'm pretty good at computers, so I applied to work at RouteMatch. I love the team that I work with. There are a lot of good personalities. It's fun helping people and meeting customers at the User Conference.

Q. What's the best strategy to solve a problem when people call for technical support?

A. Understand why things are important to them and why they want to do the things they need to do. Put yourself in their shoes and understand how your work impacts them.

Q. How do you recharge?

A. I like watching movies.

Q. Was there a film that changed your life?

A. *City of God* and *Taxi Driver* both made an impact on me.

Q. What do you binge watch?

A. *Black Mirror*. *Samurai Jack*. *Game of Thrones*. *True Detective*.

Q. Where would you most like to travel?

A. To improve my Spanish, probably Colombia or Argentina. But I've always wanted to visit Kuwait.

Q. What act would you do if RouteMatch had a talent show?

A. I'd probably play the viola and do a combination medley. Maybe start with Mozart and then go into some Migos, which is a rap group in Atlanta. I like playing pop songs on the viola. I can do a good version of "Sweet Child o' Mine."

Q. What super power would you most like to have?

A. I actually think about this a lot. I'd say the ability to move things with my mind. Or turn into ice, like Iceman on X-Men. He was really cool.

Q. What living person do you most admire and why?

A. That I know, my mom and my dad. They never gave up on me. They're always teaching me. They're very accepting. For a person I admire that I don't know, President Obama.



Writer Laura Lee Huttenbach is the author of "The Boy is Gone" and "Running with Raven" (Kensington Press, May 2017). Her website is www.LLHuttenbach.com.
