

Islam and me

My name is Lyndsey-Yazmeen Koenig; I am 17 years old and I live in Maine in the northeastern United States of America. I have been a Muslim since September 18th, 2001. This is my story of Islam and me.

“Jewish people celebrate Hanukah and are a different religion than us – different from Christianity. Judaism and Christianity are the two main religions we should focus on...”

As a teacher of mine from ninth grade reported to me I knew nothing of Islam. Nine years in Public School and didn't hear one word about Islam. To be honest with you up until 911 I have never seen a hijabed woman.

“It seems as though this was a terror attack aimed at the U.S.A. by someone or something that hated us simply hated us.” It was the day after 911 and I was watching the news, as I have done nonstop since then, and I heard about ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims.’ I sat there wondering what they were. Right then I felt a string being pulled inside my brain sending a wave to my fingers telling me, “research, research, and research!” This happens to me a lot, I owe much of my knowledge to this reflex, which I adore so much. So the string was pulled letting the dam of knowledge come rushing towards me.

I run to the bathroom, bedroom find the comfiest pair of clothes I have preparing myself for a long day of reading and research. Grab a cup of coffee and put my long hair in its famous ‘rats nest’ on the top of my head. Turn the computer on and get comfy in the leather chair. Cold to the touch, but comforting like my pilot's chair on my way to wisdom.

I proceed to the search engine Dad has raved about; I type in ‘Muslim’ and press the magic ‘go’ key! My eyes fill with colors of red, white, blue – letters of ‘m’, ‘i’ – Links! Links! Links! Which to chose, they're all so beautiful!? There are the regular sites...then there are the exceptional sites! The first one I ventured into was <http://www.islamonline.net> taught me the basics but I still yearned for more. I continued to visit numerous websites but I still couldn't find exactly what I was looking for. I wanted to talk to a young Muslim girl my age. It took me about a week of

serious searching and scaling almost all of the internet (probably, LoL) to find an e-mail pen pal site. Now the real story begins.

I filed my pen-pal form on the site writing, 'Non-Muslim seeking to speak with Muslim young woman to find out more about Islam' and hoped for the best. Within three days I received an e-mail from a young woman named Maryam who is a born Muslim, but her mom is a revert. Maryam and I began talking just about school, family, friends, and our problems. We became very close friends, almost sisters. As I was continuing to watch the American Media, which I would later find out is very bias, and usually sides with the Jewish people, I had more and more questions on Islam. Except this time I actually had someone to ask the specific questions to.

The first question I asked was "Do you think UBL did this?" and she kind of avoided my question (which I later found out why and will explain) so I went on. The next question was about the scarf (hijab); she answered me with unwavering attention and precision. The hijab was the hardest thing to put into action for me (I will explain later). But Maryam (bless her soul) did her best and told me everything she could – and what she couldn't she gave me URL's which I could read more information if I wanted.

Then there were the rules about boyfriends, pork, and more. The rules weren't the things that caught my attention, it was the benefits, love, structure, discipline, and most of all spirituality.

I was never religious before Islam. I went to church maybe a total of five times in my life. My mother grew up in a strict Roman Catholic family in New Hampshire with 6 children. My father grew up in a ProtestantAtheist household – really not practicing ever once.

So our religious life in the Koenig family was not very strong. I can remember going to church as a child and hating it. The other times I can only remember are funerals and weddings. I just remember listening to the Priests babble on and on never made sense to me. Once in a great while when I was feeling low I would read some of the Bible but always felt like it was a boggled mess that was so difficult to understand and comprehend. Not just that but it didn't make sense to me at all. Before Islam I always felt like there was a big chunk of my heart missing yet I didn't know what it was.

"So, how do I convert?" I asked Maryam on an early fall day. "Take the shaada." I took the shaada. Now I am a Muslim. The date is September 18th, 2001. My heart felt full, I felt I have a purpose, life inside me to live.

I went to good ol' Wal-Mart and bought some plain handkerchiefs – blue, red, green, and pink. I decided to wear these as my souped up version of makeshift hijaab. I have worn handkerchiefs over my hair before; it was not a big difference for me. Then came the days of wearing the handkerchiefs for 2 weeks, maybe three and going out one damp cold morning without it. It was almost as though I couldn't function. I realized it's time to try the full hijaab.

I met another sister, Umme (means Mom in Arabic, but she's like a mom to me), from Maryland via the computer. Because I was looking for someone to send me some books, maybe some extra hijabbs. Bless Umme's soul because I went to the mailbox one morning and got the beloved yellow slip saying 'you have a box' so I went literally POSTAL (no pun intended, yeah right) wondering if it was from Umme or my Aunt – my aunt always sends me tons and tons of hair products which I can't get enough of.

"Here it is...someone sent you a lot of stuff," said the Postal Worker and I look up and to my amazement there's a box as two times wider than me (and trust me, that's wide) and half my height!!! My eyes open with wonder and sheer excitement! I lug the box out to the car and squeeze it into my mom's Nissan Altima, which thank goodness is a large car, if I would have had my Saab I would have had to tie it to the roof, and flew home as fast as I could.

"It's a box of treasures!!! Ma' come look!! I can't believe this!!"

I said to my mother, screaming with excitement almost tearing up because I couldn't believe a person could ever be this generous. This was my second encounter of the love and sincerity of Islam (of course Maryam).

The box contained treasures. Dresses, Hijabbs, Books, Pamphlets, Qur'an, Pocket sized Qur'an, tapes, and the most beloved and used present of all "The Beginner's Guide to Prayer". I still have this pamphlet now and it's falling apart – I still have to use it on the last part of my prayer (where you're sitting) because I don't know all of it yet. I have never used a book so much in my life. I took out the hijabbs and the dresses and I wore my favorite outfit of all.

Now comes the story of hijaab; the best benefit Allah has given to us women. To start the story off correctly I should explain how my mother reacted to me being a Muslim. She at first didn't understand what exactly it was. Luckily I had Maryam to help me out on this one as well.

Her mother, is a revert and she had to go through the same thing I was going through (telling

her family) and she was nice enough to send my mother an e-mail explaining and trying to help. She helped a lot; mom was a bit more relaxed. It took about a week for her to warm up to Islam; to this day she still asks questions and I couldn't be more happy to answer them.

Onto hijaab story! The first day I went out in hijaab was in my new drabs (above) and could not feel more proud. There are not enough words in the English, French, and German dictionaries to explain the way I felt. Since this was about almost 2 months after 911 everyone was still on shaky ground about Muslims.

I thought, living in the sticks of Maine, that everyone would be so mean to me because a lot of people here 99.99% of them are Christian and about 50% are racist. I was wrong; I totally underestimated my own people. People were looking at me (of course) but not in a negative way. I thought the hijaab was going to be a total mess (the first time I heard of it) but today it is the best blessing Allah has given to us. The benefits [to list] would take me years, if not centuries. The most important of all is the modesty in front of men. I always, since I began to become a woman, have felt like a sirloin steak being picked over by men every day!

The only time when I feel safe and secure is in my Islamic Dress...that consists of hijaab (covering hair, neck and ears) and loose fitting clothes. Until this day, anytime which I go out without hijaab (which, alhumdulillah has been few) I feel like I am completely naked!

The hijaab, for women, is the best thing possible. I would also like to point out [to the non-Muslims] this important fact! In the 'Muslim' countries (Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.) where 99.99% of the women cover, the rate of rape and sexual assault are so low they barely exist. This is a fact - (NOTE: Get the statistics from the sisters!) - Not just a rumor.

The rest of my story is incredibly amazing. I have been living the Muslim life, alhumdulillah, and I have been trying to do my best. I have since stopped a lot of haraam (sinful) actions and continue to work on getting rid of the rest. The last part of my story is the most amazing part. I would never guess this would ever happen.

My father, who I said earlier has no religion, started to see the change Islam had on my life (for the positive) and he took note of this. I was on the telephone with him one night and he asked me to send him some information on what Islam consists of. When I heard this I said to myself,

“This is the pure actions of Allah; no one, or thing, could have possibly done such an act of pure grace.”

This is Islam in brief, and this is Islam and me.

Thank you (Salaams),

Author’s note: I would like to dedicate This to Maryam Ezzedine, Umme Zahid, And Allah.