Emily, Ex-Christian, New Zealand

Growing up in New Zealand, I was raised as a Christian however my parents were not overly religious. As a young girl I went to Sunday school every week and attended church with my grandmother and went to Christian classes as part of the school curriculum. As I got older I stopped going to church as I never really felt passionate about Christianity. In my teenage years I made a few mistakes as I got involved with a group of friends that were a bad influence and my family decided to move to Australia at the beginning of 2006 when I was 15.

I attended high school in Australia and really began to excel at school and began a new life. I achieved the grades I needed to get into my University Course so I moved out of home (closer to the university) and into student accommodation. Up until this point I had no idea about Islam except from what I had heard in the media, I had never met a Muslim person before.

One of my housemates was a Muslim and he was very open minded and was the most genuine, kind hearted person I have ever met. I did not ask him much about his religion until I got to know him a bit more and when I did I was very intrigued. I was asking him questions everyday about everything from the Quran to Arabic words! I was always interested and excited by the answers.

I was usually very skeptical about religions but with Islam I felt connected right away. A year went by and I met a lot of Muslims and they were all very kind and peaceful people and they were always willing to answer my questions. I started doing my own research just before I turned 19 and I knew I wanted to convert to Islam before Ramadan 2009. The previous Ramadan I had fasted some days but I later learned that none of those counted unless I was Muslim.

After my 19th birthday I was eager to learn even more about Islam as I received the book called "Don't Be Sad" which had a lot of referencing to the Quran and I realized a lot of it was my theory on life anyway. I then moved into a house by myself and I was very lonely and depressed all the time. Because I was always alone, whenever I said *Bismillah* (I begin with the name of God) I felt very

relieved and safe. I knew I needed to convert to Islam but I didn't want my Muslim friends to think I was doing it just because of them so I was very hesitant.

I was also hesitant because I did not realize how easy Islam would be for a 19 year old girl. I was just very concerned that people, even my friends, did not know much about Islam. Then one night I had a dream that I was in Saudi Arabia and I was Muslim and I was wearing a Hijab and it fell off in front of everyone, but nobody said anything to me. When I woke up I felt this was a sign that Islam was going to be easy for me. Many things happened to me over the course of the few weeks, all of which I knew were signs from Allah.

I was discussing my concerns with Zia and Samy from islamreligion.com and they said why wait? You don't know what will happen tomorrow. It just made so much sense. I wanted to convert to Islam right away.

I was very nervous to tell my friend who had answered all my questions over the past year as I didn't know what he would think. He was very happy for me and he said he would help me and the next day he brought me a compass as a gift so I could find the right direction to pray. I learnt the *Shahada* and that evening he helped me convert to Islam. I was so happy that evening, I cried out of joy. It was one of the happiest moments of my life and I was so glad my friend could be there with me to help me.

I have still not told some of my friends. I am waiting, in the meantime I am still learning. All in all, I am loving my new life as a Muslim. I hope everyday I can just learn more about Islam and I am very excited for my first Ramadan.