

Linda Delgado, Ex-Christian, USA

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About five years ago, I was fifty-two years old and a Christian. I had not become a member of any Christian church, but all my life I had been searching for the truth. I attended many churches and studied with their teachers. All fell short and I recognized none as being the truth about Allah. Since I was nine years old, I had read the Bible everyday of my life. I cannot tell you, over the many years, how many times I searched it for the truth.

During the long years of my search for the truth, I studied with many religious faiths. For over a year I studied two times a week with a Catholic priest, but could not accept Catholic beliefs. I spent another year studying with the Jehovah Witnesses and did not accept their beliefs either. I spent nearly two years with the LDS (Latter-Day Saints, i.e. the Mormons) and still did not find truth. I had a Jewish friend and we had many discussions about the Jewish beliefs. I went to many Protestant churches, some for months at a time, trying to find answers to my questions.

My heart told me Jesus was not God but a Prophet. My heart told me Adam and Eve were responsible for their sin, not me. My heart told me I should pray to God and no other. My reason told me that I was responsible for both my good and bad deeds and that God would never assume the form of a man in order to tell me that I was not responsible. He had no need to live and die as a human; after all, He is God.

So there I was, full of questions and praying to God for help. I had a real fear of dying and not knowing the truth. I prayed and I prayed. I received answers from preachers and priests like, "This is a mystery." I felt that God wanted people to go to heaven so He wouldn't make it a mystery as to how to get there, how to

live life accordingly, and how to understand Him. I knew in my heart that all that I was hearing was untrue.

I live in Arizona, USA and at the age of fifty-two had still never talked to a Muslim. I, like many Westerners, had read much in the media about Islam being a fanatical religion of terrorists, so I never researched any books or information about Islam. I knew nothing about the religion.

My Discovery

About four years ago, I retired after twenty-four years as a police officer. My husband also retired as a police officer. The year before my retirement I was still a police sergeant/supervisor. Police officers worldwide have a common bond, which we call a law-enforcement brother-sisterhood. We always help one another no matter what police department or country.

That year I received a flyer asking for help with a group of Saudi Arabian police officers who had come to the United States to learn English at a local University and attend a police academy in the city that I live in. The Saudi police officers were looking for homes to live in with host families in order to learn about US customs and to practice the English that they would be learning.

My son is raising my granddaughter as a single parent. We helped him to find a house next to ours so that we could help in raising her. I talked to my husband and we decided that it would be good to help these police officers. It would be an opportunity for our granddaughter to learn about people from another country. I was told that the young men were Muslims and I was very curious.

An Arizona State University Saudi interpreter brought a young man named Abdul to meet us. He could speak no English. We showed him a bedroom and bathroom, which would be his when he stayed with us. I liked Abdul immediately. His respectful and kind manner won my heart!

Next Fahd was brought to our home. He was younger and shyer, but a wonderful young man. I became their tutor and we shared many discussions about police work, the USA, Saudi Arabia, Islam, etc. I observed how they helped each other and also the other sixteen Saudi police officers who came to the USA to learn English. During the year they were here, I came to respect and admire Fahd and Abdul for not letting the American culture have any impact on them. They went to mosque on Fridays, said their prayers no matter how tired they were, and were always careful of what they ate, etc. They showed me how to cook some traditional Saudi foods and they took me to Arab markets and restaurants. They were very kind with my granddaughter. They showered her with presents, jokes and friendship.

They treated my husband and me with much respect. Each day, they would call to see if I needed them to go to market for me before they went to study with their fellow Saudi officers. I showed them how to use the computer, and I ordered Arab papers online and began to search the Internet to learn more about them, their customs and religion. I did not want to do things that would offend them.

One day, I asked them if they had an extra Quran. I wanted to read what it had to say. They sent to their embassy in Washington DC and they got me an English Quran, tapes, and other pamphlets. At my request, we began to discuss Islam (they had to speak English and this became the focus of our tutoring sessions). I grew to love these young men, and they told me that I was the first non-Muslim they had ever taught Islam to! After a year, they completed their studies and training at the police academy. I was able to help them with their police studies, as I had been a police instructor during my career as a police officer. I invited many of their brother-officers to the house to help with university projects and to practice English. One brother had his wife come to stay here in the US, and I was invited to their home. They were very gracious and I was able to talk to his wife about Muslim dress, prayer ablutions, and similar things.

A week before "my foster sons" were to return home to Saudi Arabia, I planned a family dinner with all their favorite traditional foods (I bought some because I didn't know how to cook all of them). I purchased a hijab and an abaya (long Islamic gown). I wanted them to go home remembering me dressed appropriately as a Muslim sister. Before we ate, I said the Shahadah (public declaration of faith). The boys cried and laughed and it was so special. I believe in my heart that Allah sent the boys to me in answer to my years of prayers. I believe He chose me to see the truth by the light of Islam. I believe Allah sent Islam to my very home. I praise Him for His mercy, love and kindness to me.

My Journey in Islam

My Saudi boys returned to their homeland about a week after my reversion. I missed them greatly, but was still happy. I had joined the local mosque as a member almost immediately after my reversion and registered myself as a Muslim. I was anticipating a warm welcome from my new Muslim community. I thought all Muslims were like my Saudi boys and the other young Saudi officers whom I had met and spent time with during the previous year.

My family was still in a state of shock! They thought I would stick with this new religion for a while, become disgruntled, and move on to another religion as I had done all my adult life. They were surprised at the changes that I began to make in my daily life. My husband is a congenial man, so when I said that we were going to be eating halal foods and eliminating haram (forbidden) foods, he said, "Okay."

My next change was removing pictures of people and animals from the rooms in the house. One day my husband came home from work to find me placing family pictures that had once hung on the walls in our home, in large, handsomely-bound photo albums. He watched and didn't comment.

Next I wrote a letter to my non-Muslim family telling them about my reversion and how it would and wouldn't change our family relationships. I explained a few of the basics of Islam. Still my family kept their own counsel, and I continued to work on learning prayer and reading my Quran. I got active in sister groups on the Internet and this facilitated my learning about my new beliefs.

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I also attended a "Fundamentals of Islam" class at the mosque when I could get away from my work. I was still a state police sergeant and it was difficult – no, impossible to cover. This became a source of real discontent and concern for me. Just eight months and I could retire, so I asked for and was granted the right to telecommute from my home three days a week doing planning and research projects.

After the first six months had passed, sisters at the mosque that I attended still hadn't warmed up to me. I was disappointed. I began to feel like an outsider. I was puzzled and concerned. I tried to become active in community services with a few sisters who had been friendly towards me. I looked for the kindness, friendship, and best of manners that were practiced each and every day by my Saudi boys. I made many mistakes at the mosque, such as talking in the prayer room as I tried to get up and down from the floor. I went to a community celebration and ate with my left hand; I wore clear nail polish on my trimmed nails and got scolded. I did wudu (ablutions) incorrectly and was frowned at. I became very discouraged.

Then one day I received a package in the mail from a sister-friend who I had met on the Internet. In the package were several abayas, hijabs, silk stockings, and a warm and friendly note welcoming me as her sister in Islam. She lives in Kuwait. Next a dear sister sent me a prayer robe and prayer rug she had hand-made herself. This dear sister lives in Saudi Arabia. I got an email that had a statement that I always remember at times when I get that "outsider" feeling. The note said: "I am glad that I became Muslim before I met many Muslims." This is not an insult. It was a reminder that Islam is perfect and it is we Muslims who are imperfect. Just as I have shortcomings, so may my sisters and brothers. I also began to understand what I personally believe to be one of the greatest gifts that Allah gave to the Muslims: the sister and brotherhood in Islam.

Over the past four years my life has changed dramatically. My family has come to accept with generosity and tolerance that I am Muslim and will remain

Muslim. All thanks be to Allah for sparing me the trials of so many reverts who must deal with beloved family who strive to dissuade them from Islam.

Gradually, I made some sister friends locally and by cyber space, dozens of sister friends became my Muslim family bringing me support, love and friendship. It was close to my first year as a Muslim that I became ill with a series of life-threatening diseases. I clung tight to the rope of Islam and was grateful for the black seed tea and ZamZam water that my sister-friends sent me from around the world along with their daily du`aa' (supplications).

As my health continued to fail and I grew weaker physically, I had to discontinue community service work and became more isolated from the local Muslim community. I continued to work hard on my prayer, having great difficulty with the Arabic pronunciation but not giving up. My Islamic teacher made some cassette tapes, and a sister brought them to my home to help me. After two years, I had learned to recite four Surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an. This may seem like a small number to most Muslims, but for me it was a very big accomplishment. I set about learning the words for the other parts of prayer; another two years of struggle.

During the early part of my third year as a Muslim, I suffered a heart attack and had heart surgery. It was a sad time for me, as I knew that I would never again touch my head to the floor when praying, but would forever have to sit in my chair and pray. It was at this time that I truly understood the provision from Allah that Islam is the religion of ease. Praying while seated in a chair is acceptable; not fasting when one is sick is acceptable. I did not have to feel that I was less a Muslim because of these circumstances.

After visiting several mosques and observing that they were like mini United Nations, I began to see that the small groups within the mosque were mostly formed because of language and culture and not because of liking or disliking any person. I felt good that regardless of these differences, I could always count on a smile and an "As-Salaam' Alaykum!"

After a while, I began to gravitate towards sisters who are reverts to Islam like me. We have much in common – we experience many of the same trials, such as non-Muslim family members, difficulty pronouncing Arabic, being lonely on Muslim holidays, and not having a family member to break fast with during Ramadan. Sometimes our reversions meant losing life-long friends who just couldn't accept our new habits, or it was because of our discontinuance of activities common to non-Muslims, such as dancing and mixing in groups.

As I grew less able to do community services, I searched for some way to contribute to the greater Muslim community. I continually asked Allah for His help in this. One day, my young granddaughter suggested that I write books about my Saudi boys, Islam, and my family's experience with Islam. I decided to write

the books and also include stories about a group of young girls, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who were friends. The stories would include the young girls' problems encountered at school and at home and I would use my knowledge of Islam as a guide for these book characters.

I began writing a book series that I called Islamic Rose Books. I created an e-group for sister authors and aspiring writers and this developed into the creation of the Islamic Writers Alliance. The Alliance is an international organization created to provide support for female Muslim authors and aspiring writers. Our main goal is to help each other promote our works to readers and publishers. I also decided to help two Muslim food banks by creating databases that help them to track their inventory, clients, and contacts and to create reports necessary for funding purposes. I decided that I would spend a large portion of my profits from book sales to buy books for Islamic children's libraries. I have discovered that many such libraries have lots of empty shelves where Islamic books belong.

I still have much to learn about Islam. I never tire of reading the Qur'an and one of my favorite pastimes is reading about prominent, historical Islamic figures. When I am unsure about something in Islam, I look to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I see how he responded to situations and use this as my guide. My journey in Islam will continue, and I look forward to many new experiences. I thank Allah daily for His Mercy and Love.