

Khadija Evans, Ex-Catholic, USA

(part 1 of 2)



My name is Khadija Evans and this is the story of how my husband and I came to embrace Islam.

I can remember standing in the kitchen of the house I lived in when I was just 7 or 8 years old and looking towards the door that went outside. I prayed to a god whom I wasn't sure existed and I begged Him to show himself to me if He was really there. Nothing happened.

I can remember being 9 or 10 years old and writing a letter to God and hiding it in the heat register in my bedroom, thinking that God, if He existed, would come and retrieve it and answer my prayers. But the next day, the letter was still there.

I had always had a hard time accepting the existence of God, and of understanding the beliefs taught in Christian churches. Even though my parents weren't very religious, and rarely went to church, they thought it was best that my two brothers and I go. We were allowed to choose our religion when we very young. I think I was about 6 or 7, and my brothers were 1 and 2 years older than I. I chose a Methodist church for no other reason than it was a few blocks away from our house, and my brother's chose a Lutheran church because it was also close, and I hadn't chosen it.

I went to the church until I was 13 years old. I was baptized and confirmed there when I was 11. I went along with the baptism and confirmation because all children who were 11 received confirmation, and if they hadn't already been baptized, that was done at the same time. Even then I knew that doubts I had about God and Christian teachings were things best kept to myself.

When I was 13 my family moved to another town with no churches within walking distance, and my parents weren't eager to get up early and drive us kids to

church, and so our religious training stopped until I was 15 and my mom suddenly found religion. She began attending an Assembly of God church, occasionally dragging my dad along. I went willingly. I had already begun a search for God that wouldn't end until I was 42 years old.

I remember being "born again". Caught up in the fervor of the hell and damnation that the minister preached at the Assembly of God church. I became "high on religion" thinking I had finally found "Him." Little did I know, but the high would be short lived, as I again began to have doubts and unanswered questions.

When I was 17 I met the daughter of an assistant Baptist minister and began going to their church. My dad from the time I was at least 6 years old had sexually abused me and I told the assistant minister about it. He arranged with my parents to let me live with him and his family in a type of "private foster care." My dad paid him \$100 a week. My parents also attended the church for a brief time, until the minister announced from the pulpit that my dad was a child molester. Before that day though, my mom, dad and I were each baptized at the church.

One day after spending the day with my parents I returned to my foster home only to find the house empty. Cleaned out. Not a stick of furniture. We found out that the minister had been caught embezzling from the church and he and his family had left town in a hurry. I returned to my parent's home and the abuse.

As a result of what that minister had done, what little belief I had in God was totally lost and I became an atheist. For the next 25 years I would fluctuate between believing, Agnosticism, and Atheism.

When I was 26 I went to 3 months of Rights of Initiation for Catholic Adults and then was baptized and confirmed in the Roman Catholic Church. I had been allowed to by-pass the full year of classes because I hadn't called the church to inquire about converting until 3 months before the Easter Vigil Mass when confirmation for adults was held.

I had entered the Catholic religion with the same philosophy that I had once heard Alcoholics Anonymous has, "Bring your body, your mind will follow." I didn't really believe in God, or in the core teachings of the Catholic Church, but I wanted so badly to believe in a power higher than myself, that I went faithfully to Mass 7 days a week, hoping that somehow I would start to believe. But after several months, I began to realize that it wasn't going to happen, and my Mass attendance became a once a week thing, then once a month, until when I was 30 and met the man who today is my husband and who wasn't Catholic, and I stopped attending Mass altogether.

I had never told anyone before my husband that I didn't believe in God. I don't think he took me seriously at first. I don't think he had ever known an Atheist. And he couldn't understand why I would have been going to church if I didn't believe in God.

My husband is 29 years older than I. We've had a wonderful marriage for these last 10 years. When we first met, I still desperately wanted to believe, and kept making him promise me, "When you get to Heaven" he would ask God to give me the strength to believe, and if at all possible, he would give me a sign, one that I couldn't chalk up to my imagination, so I would know there really was a god. He always promised me he would.

We were living in rural Alabama when I was 32 years old. I developed ulcerations on both corneas and when they healed, I was legally blind. Because of damage from infection that had been done to the tissue that donated corneas would have to adhere to, I couldn't find an eye surgeon who believed that transplanted corneas wouldn't be rejected.

I was still searching for God. I was searching for hope of something better than what this world had to offer. Some kind of evidence of the chance for existence after death. Some way to achieve it.

As a teenager I had watched Pat Robertson on the 700 Club, and as a young adult I listened faithfully to televangelist Rev. Jimmy Swaggert. In my 30's I watched programs on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. All the while hoping that one of the ministers would say something that would click in my mind, and I would finally know, "Yes, there really is a god!" None of them ever said anything that caused that connection to happen, though many said things that confused me even more.

During the first 10 years after I became legally blind, I tried attending different churches, Baptist again, Assembly of God again, non-Denominational, Church of God, Mormon, and even studied up on Wicca. But I always lost interest after just a few months. Things the religions taught just didn't add up. There were just too many things left to faith. Things that had no proof other than one's faith. I couldn't believe something when the only proof was some words in a book that in large part didn't make sense.

I remember one night when I was about 35 years old, lying in bed and praying to God, whom I still wasn't sure existed, and asking Him that if He did exist to lead me to someone who could help me to believe. But I found no one.

At age 36 I acquired a Braille Bible and started reading it, once again hoping to find proof of God's existence. But with the Bible being so hard to understand, with so much of it not really being explainable, I lost interest after reading just a

few of its books. At about that time, although still wanting to find God, I gave up my search. I had become completely disillusioned with religion.

On September 11, 2001 I was sitting at my computer. It was before 9 a.m. and as usual the television, which was sitting to my right, was turned on for background noise. I heard the sound that is made to notify viewers of an important news announcement. I stopped and turned towards the TV. A reporter began talking and one of the towers of the World Trade Center showed in the background. He said an accident had happened. A small plane had hit one of the towers of the World Trade Center. I'm legally blind, but I could see well enough to know that it wasn't a small plane that had hit the tower. The hole was massive. And I didn't think it was possible to accidentally hit something so big.

As I watched, another plane flew into the other tower. I couldn't see the plane itself, it was too small for me to see even during the instant replays with my face practically pressed up against the screen, but I saw the fireball that exploded away from the building.

I jumped up and ran into the bedroom and told my husband to hurry and get up because terrorists were flying planes into the World Trade Center buildings! He immediately got out of bed and came in to the living room and sat in his recliner and began to watch. It was about 9 a.m.

As time went by it was announced that a plane had been flown into the Pentagon and another hijacked plane had crashed in Pennsylvania. I wondered when it would end? And what in the world was going on???

At one point the reporter said it looked like "debris" was falling from the buildings. My husband said it was people jumping. Something he has never been able to forget. I was grateful that my vision was too bad for me to be able to make out what even looked like "debris."

The reporter said a part of the first tower had fallen away from the building. He spoke in a kind of hesitant voice. Now I wonder if he was unsure of what he was seeing. Because we later found out that a part of the building hadn't fallen away. The building had completely collapsed.

A female reporter was crying and a male reporter hugged her. I was crying too. And my husband hugged me.

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For weeks afterward I would start crying for no apparent reason. I'd be riding on the bus and have to turn my head towards the window and pretend I was looking out so that other riders wouldn't see the tears escaping my eyes.

When we were in a restaurant, I'd have to use my napkin to dab the tears welling up in my eyes before the other diners noticed and wondered if I was some kind of a nut.

I was Christian then and I cared. And I was devastated. I couldn't understand how a religion could promote such violence, as the media was saying Islam did. It made no sense to me. So I decided to find out for myself. One way or another I wanted to know the truth.

Because of my partial blindness I was limited to information from the Internet. Finding books about Islam in Braille or ink print that was large enough for me to read was impossible. I was able to use a computer because I had magnification software installed so I could enlarge the font on the screen to a size that I could read.

I did searches and I began to read about Islam. I went to web sites that taught the basics of Islam, and I joined Muslim women's e-groups where I was able to ask and get answers that I confirmed through further research.

I've always been a sceptic. It's always been hard for me to believe something that I didn't understand. I was never one to believe something simply because someone said it was so. I had to know it in my mind as well as in my heart.

While studying Islam I learned that the God Muslims worship is the same God as that of Christians and Jews. The God of Abraham and Moses. I found that Islam doesn't promote or condone hatred of non-Muslims, nor does it condone the killing of innocent people.

By studying Islam I found the answers that the media wasn't telling us and I came to know that Islam is the True Religion. *Alhumdulilah!* I read a lot of convincing evidence, but the things that proved to me that there is a god, and that Islam is the True Religion and that that the Quran is the Word of God, were those in the Quran itself. The things that are of a scientific nature. Things that have been discovered by scientists only in the last 100 years. The only one who could have known those things 1400 years ago was God.

For example, one day I was at a web site that was about some of the scientific proofs in the Qur'an. One of the verses in the Qur'an tells about the death of our own solar system.

Al-Rahman 37-38 "When the sky is torn apart, so it was (like) a red rose like ointment. Then which of the favors of your lord will you deny?"

There was a link that went to the NASA web site^[1].

When I clicked the link I had no idea what was going to be on the next page, but what I saw took my breath away. Tears came to my eyes. I knew - if I had had

any doubts left - I knew at the moment, that Islam is the True Religion of God. *Mash'allah!*

The page the link took me to showed what looked like a red rose. It was the "Cat's Eye Nebula." Which was an exploding star 3000 light years away. It had been photographed with the Hubble Space Telescope. Scientists say that it is the same fate that awaits our own solar system. Muslims refer to it as the "Rose Nebula." It had been described in the Qur'an 1400 years ago. People back then had no way of knowing about it. Only God could have known.

On September 12, 2002, the day of my birthday, scientists using the Hubble Space Telescope found a second Rose Nebula. A gift from God to all mankind. This time the scientists called it by its rightful name, "The Rose Nebula."^[2]

After accepting in my mind as well as in my heart that Islam is the True Religion, I knew that I was already a Muslim and the only thing left to do was to profess my faith.

I looked in an Internet directory for mosques in my community. I called the one in the next town and told the person who answered the phone that I wanted to convert to Islam, and asked him when I could make my *Shahada* (Profession of Faith). He told me to be there at 4 p.m. on Saturday when the Imam would also be there. I told him that I ride the bus everywhere and it wouldn't be running late enough for me to be able to get back home and so could I come earlier? He said not to worry; someone would give me a ride home. I arrived as scheduled, and as God had scheduled, I began my new life. *Mash'allah!*

I have since come to realize that on that day, the greatest event of my life occurred. I had always thought that the most wonderful thing to ever happen to me was the day that I married my husband. But I now know it wasn't. The most important day of my life was the day I made my *Shahada* and accepted Islam as the way of life God intended me to live. It was the day I acknowledged that Islam is the way to salvation, to Heaven, and I made a choice to practice it.

I can't say my converting to Islam thrilled my husband. He believed what the media was saying about Muslims and the religion. He didn't like it that I went to the masjid [mosque] several evenings a week and left him home alone to be bored. One night after he was finished complaining about me going to the masjid yet again I sat down a few feet away from him and I calmly told him, "I will never ask you to practice a religion you don't believe in. I love you too much to try and force that on you. But I do want you to learn about Islam so that you will at least understand what it is that I believe." I then stood up and went into the bedroom and finished dressing to go to the masjid. I kissed him goodbye and I left.

When I returned home I found his whole attitude had changed. He was bright and cheerful. That night, before going to bed, he began to learn about the beautiful religion of Islam.

My husband began going to the masjid with me. While I studied with the women, he would talk with a man and ask him questions. At home he read things on the Internet, and books that he had borrowed from the masjid. We would discuss different things he was learning, and when a reporter on television would relate the latest lie or myth about Islam I would point it out to him and explain the truth.

When the day came and he told me about how some aspect of Islam was to be practiced, in a “know it all” tone of voice, as if it were a fact, something that I myself didn’t know about, I asked him to tell me “How do you know that???” and he replied, “Because it’s in the Quran!!” I was stunned! He believed! *Alhumdulilah!* He knew that Islam was True! *Mash ’ allah!* If it was in the Qur’an, as far as he was concerned it was true! Thirty-six days after I publicly professed my faith in God and His messenger, Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, my husband professed his. *Mash ’ allah!* We had an Islamic marriage ceremony the same evening. I cried when my husband made his *Shahada*. I knew we would be in Eternity together!

A month before, a man at the mosque had asked me what I thought the chances of my husband converting were. I didn’t want this man getting his hopes up, or expecting more of me than I could deliver and so I bluntly told him, “Zero.” I said, “I can’t imagine someone so dramatically changing their beliefs after having believed something else for 70 years.” But 14 days before his 71st birthday he embraced Islam as his religion and his way of life. *Alhumdulilah!*

In the Muslim community we have found another family. We have found friendship, love and acceptance that were taught in the Christian religions we practiced at different points in our lives, but that we felt never actually existed among most of the members of the churches we went to.

Most of the Muslims in our area are immigrants, but we have found no intolerance of Americans whether they are Muslim or not. We were both welcomed into the family of Islam the very first time each of us went to the masjid. We’ve always felt welcome and accepted.

Since embracing Islam we have found direction and purpose for our lives. We have found the meaning for our existence. We have come to realize that we really are here only for a short time and that what comes afterwards is far better than the fleeting pleasures that this world has to offer us.

I have found a sense of security concerning life after death that I had never known before. We have both come to see the problems that we once saw as being

major as actually being opportunities to grow. We thank God for what we have, as well for what we don't. God knows best.

Today we are Muslim. We still care about 9/11. I still cry when I think a little too much about the events of that day. My husband still remembers the people jumping from the buildings. We wish all we could say about that day was where we had been when we "heard" that the WTC had been attacked. But we did see it happen, and it was the most devastating thing to ever happen in our lives. But from tragedy came victory. From death has come the knowledge that we will have life after our death. And it will be spent together.

Footnotes:

[1] (<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap991031.html>)

[2] (<http://www.cnn.com/2002/TECH/space/09/12/hubble.rose/>)