My search for a religion began in high school when I was 15 or 16 yrs old. I had been associating with a bad group of people whom I thought were my friends, but in time I realized these people were losers. I saw what direction their lives were heading in, and it wasn't a good one. I didn't want these people to have any affect on my success for the future, so I cut myself off from them completely. It was hard in the beginning because I was alone without friends. I started to look for something to associate myself with and something that I could rely on and base my life on....something that no person could ever use to destroy my future with. Naturally, I turned to seeking God. Finding out who God was and what the truth was wasn't easy, however. What was the truth anyway?! This was my primary question as I began my search for a religion.

In my own family, there have been many shifts of religion. My family has Jews and a few kinds of Christianity in it, and now, Alhumdulilah (all praise is for God) Islam.

When my Mom and Dad were married, they felt the need to decide what faith to bring there children up in. Since the Catholic Church was really the only option for them (our town just has 600 people) they both converted to Catholicism and raised my sister and I as Catholics. Going back through the stories of conversions in my own family, it seems that they are all conversions of convenience. I don't think they were truly seeking God, but just manipulating religion as the means to achieving an end. Even after all these changes in the past, religion was never of extreme importance for my Mom, Dad, sister or I. If anything, ours was the family you saw at church during Christmas time and Easter. I always felt that religion was something separate from my life, 6 days a week or life and one day a week for church, on the rare occasions when I did go. In other words, I wasn't conscious of God or how to live according to His teachings on a day to day basis.

I didn't accept some Catholic practices including:

1) Confessions to a priest: I thought why couldn't I just confess to God without having to go through a man to get to Him?

2) The "Perfect" Pope- How can a mere man, not even a prophet, be perfect?!

3) The worship of saints- wasn't this a direct violation of the first commandment? Even after 14 years of forced Sunday school attendance, the answers I received to these questions and others were, "You just have to have faith!!" Should I have faith because someone TOLD me to?! I thought faith should be based on the truth and answers that appealed to logic, I was interested to find some.

I didn't want the truth of my parents, or friends, or anyone else. I wanted God's truth. I wanted every idea I held to be true to me because I believed it entirely, heart and soul. I decided if I was to find the answers to my questions, I would have to search with an objective mind, and I began to read...

I decided that Christianity was not the religion for me. I didn't have anything personal with Christians, but I found that the religion itself contained many inconsistencies, especially when I read the Bible. In the Bible, the inconsistencies I came across and the things that made no sense at all were so numerous that I actually felt embarrassed that I had never questioned them before or even noticed them!

Since some people in my family are Jewish, I started to research Judaism. I thought to myself the answer may be there. So for about a year I did research on anything concerning Judaism, I mean in DEPTH research!! Everyday I tried to read and learn something (I still know about Orthodox Jewish kosher laws!). I went to the library and checked out every book on Judaism within a two month period, looked up info. On the internet, went to the synagogue, talked with other Jewish people in nearby towns and read the Torah and Talmud. I even had one of my Jewish friends come visit me from Israel! I thought maybe I had found what I was looking for. Yet, the day I was supposed to go the synagogue and meet with the rabbi about possibly making my conversion official, I backed out. I honestly don't know what stopped me from leaving the house that day, but I just stopped as I was about to go out the door and went back in and sat down. I felt like I was in one of those dreams where you try to run but everything is in slow motion. I knew the rabbi was there and waiting for me, but I didn't even call to say I was coming. The rabbi didn't call me either. Something was missing...

After learning that Judaism was also not the answer, I thought (also after much pressure from my parents) to give Christianity one more try. I had, as I said, a good background in the technicalities from my years of Sunday schools, but I was more concerned with finding the truth behind the technicalities. What was the

beauty of it all, where was the security of it and how I could accept it logically? I knew if I were to seriously consider Christianity, Catholicism was out. I went to every other Christian church in my town, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Latter Day Saints (Mormon), and non-denominational churches. I didn't find what I was looking for - answers!! It wasn't the environment of the people which turned me away; it was the discrepancies between denominations which disturbed me. I believed there had to be one right way, so how could I possibly chose the "right" denomination? In my estimation it was impossible and unfair for a Compassionate and Merciful God to leave mankind with such a choice. I was lost...

(part 2 of 2)

At this point I was just as confused and frustrated as when I began my search. I felt like throwing up my arms to God and shouting, "What now?" I wasn't a Jew, I wasn't a Christian; I was just a person who believed in one God. I thought of giving up organized religion all together. All I wanted was the truth, I didn't care what holy book it came from; I just wanted it.

One day I was reading on the internet and decided to take a break and find a chat room. I noticed a "religion chat", which of course I was interested in, so I clicked on it. I saw a room called "Muslim chat". Should I go in? I was hoping no terrorists would gain access to my e-mail and send me computer viruses - or worse. Images of huge men dressed in black with big beards coming to the door and kidnapping me flashed in my brain. (You can tell how much I knew about Islam - zero!) But then I thought, C'mon, this is just an innocent investigation. I decided to go in and noticed that the people in this room weren't as scary as I had imagined they would be. In fact, most of them called each other "brother" or "sister" even if they had just met! I said hi to everyone and told them to fill me in on the basics of Islam - which I knew nothing about. What they had to say was interesting and coincided with what I already believed. Some people offered to send me books so I said okay. (By the way, I never did get any viruses and no men showed up at my door to take me away, except my husband but I went willingly!)

When I logged off the chat, I went directly to the library and checked out every book on Islam, just as I had done with Judaism. Now I was interested to read and learn more. Before I could even get the huge stack of books home, I wanted to look through a few. This was a turning point for me.... The first few I looked through explained the basics in more detail, some were scholarly and some had pictures of huge beautiful mosques with women in scarves. Luckily I also checked out a Quran...I opened it up at random and began to read. The language was what hit me first, I felt an authority talking to me, not a man talking as I had with other "sacred" texts. The passage I read (and unfortunately I don't know what it was) talked about what God expects you to do in this life and how to live it

according to His commandments. It stated that God is The Most Gracious and Merciful and The Forgiver. Most importantly, unto Him is our return. Before I knew it, I could hear each of my tear drops as they hit the pages that I was reading. I was crying right in the middle of the library, because finally, after all my searching and wondering I had found what I was looking for- Islam. I knew the Quran was something unique because I had read a lot of religious literature, and NONE of it was ever this clear or gave me such a feeling. Now I can see the wisdom of God…for letting me explore Judaism and Christianity so thoroughly before I found Islam, so I could compare them all and realize that NOTHING compares to Islam.

From that point on I kept researching Islam. I approached it by looking for inconsistencies as I had done with Judaism and Christianity, but there wasn't any to be found. I scoured the Quran, searching for any discrepancy; even to this day I haven't been able to find ONE inconsistency in it! Another great thing I love about the Quran is it challenges the reader to question it. It says about itself that if it wasn't from God surely you would find a lot of inconsistency in it! Not only was Islam free of inconsistencies, it had an answer for any question I could think of - an answer that made sense.

After three months, I decided that Islam was the answer and made my conversion official by saying the Shahadah. However, I had to say my Shahadah over the speaker phone with an imam from Pennsylvania because there were no Muslims or mosques near me (the NEAREST was about 6 hours away). I have never regretted my decision to convert. Since there were no Muslims living near me, I had to take initiative and do much learning on my own, but I never grew tired of it because I was learning the truth. Accepting Islam was like an awakening of my spirit, my mind and even how I viewed the world.

I could compare it to someone who has bad eyesight; they struggle to keep up on class, can't concentrate and are constantly challenged by their handicap. If you just give them a pair of glasses everything becomes clear and in focus. This is how my experience of Islam is: like receiving a pair of glasses, which have allowed me, for the first time, to really see.