

## Valerie Wright, Ex-Christian, USA (part 2 of 2)

**Description:** A story of an American teenager who discovers Islam from many signs that God has placed for her. Part 2: How he then finally embraced Islam.

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When I was 15, I went to live with my father. I stayed with him for two and a half years, and during that time I became regularly involved in a Methodist church. I also sometimes attended the Baptist church that my stepmother went to. At each church that I visited, I always felt that something was missing. And even though everyone was friendly to me, I always felt that I did not belong among those people, especially my age peers. Still, it never occurred to me to look for another religion.

When I was 17, I had a dream one night. I was standing beside a green bush with small leaves and small yellow flowers. An angel swooshed before me, but I couldn't see it, except for a kind of clear outline of its form or energy. It gathered a bouquet of the yellow flowers for me. The flowers sparkled. Then the angel picked me up and carried me to a special place. Because I could not see the angel, I saw everything around me as if I were flying.

I entered a place where the sun shone, filtered through a light mist. At first I saw tall grass swaying and trees with large maroon leaves. As we proceeded, the grass became shorter, and there were trees with very bright red, pink, and white flowers with small black centers. The flowers were profuse; they covered the branches and the trunks, even the ground at their bases. The next trees were some kind of evergreen trees.

As I turned and looked around, I saw a rectangular patch of cultivated land in the distance to my right. It seemed that some very tall herbs were growing there. I saw another, smaller rectangle of purple irises. Beside them was a wooden house. The angel carried me around the house once, so that I could see that it was in the shape of a perfect square. The angel put me down, and we entered.

Inside were many adults and children, all of them quite happy. They left as we entered to give us privacy. We entered a small reception area where there were two couches and a small Japanese style table between them. There appeared an old woman with white hair tied up in a bun and a long black dress with a white lacy collar. She gestured that I should make myself comfortable and asked if I would like a drink. After I had settled, she began to speak to me, telling me things about my future (none of which I remember). She concluded by saying, "You have to make some changes in your life first." I felt very afraid of these words, for I wasn't sure whether I was strong enough. I turned to the angel and said, "I don't know if I can do it." Then it lifted me up and threw me in the air, where the dream ended.

Near the end of the school year, I was at a good-bye party for one of my foreign exchange friends. One girl's mother came to me. I knew the girl as a friend, but I had never seen the mother before. She told me, "When my daughter speaks about you, I get such a feeling of joy and happiness in my heart, and I feel a strong need to tell you that God has a plan for you."

Some time passed, and I was almost ready to graduate from high school. That was when I met some Muslims and had real in-depth contact with them. They did not practice their religion, but there was something I liked about their interactions with each other. There seemed to be a mutual feeling between them that was stronger than any I had seen between any people before. They also spoke Arabic with each other a lot of the time, and I wished to understand what they were saying. So I determined to find an Arabic class and surprise them.

The only classes I found that suited my schedule were given at a local mosque, so I went there. I never learned much Arabic, but the sisters in the mosque taught me about Islam. For every big, deep question I had, they provided me with very simple, logical, and profound answers. I felt within myself that Islam was a religion I could accept. So on my 19th birthday, I officially declared my Shahadah. After saying it, I leapt up with joy, my arms in the air. "Yes!" I am a Muslim now, praise God.

After becoming Muslim, I felt much more at peace with my spiritual foundation. My family was quite upset at first, but they never stopped speaking with me or reaching out to me with love. Some of them have come to understand a little more about Islam and have become more comfortable and accepting of my decision. All praise be to Allah.

Through its life-permeating system, Islam has affected the decisions I make in life. Islam is not just a "Sunday-feel-good affair." I don't doubt that some sincere Christians make the effort to practice their religion in their daily lives, but Islam has a much more comprehensive set of guidelines to follow. Everything I do comes with an awareness that I will be held accountable for my actions and that I need to constantly ask for Allah's forgiveness. Islam has given me the purpose in life that I had been seeking. It is one of the few things I am passionate about. Before Islam, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. One of my great wishes is that I can help another person become Muslim. That still has yet to happen.

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