Jenny, Ex-Christian, Australia (part 2 of 2)

Description: An Australian Protestant teenager, troubled by the concept of Trinity, who embraced Islam following a year at a Buddhist High school in Japan.
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When I returned to Australia from Japan I had grown closer to a girl that I went to high school with. She was always somebody who I considered to be a good friend, but wasn't in 'my group of friends' whom I sat with in class or for lunch. Some of the people in that group I haven't heard from and haven't seen since I returned. I realized that this other girl and I had a lot more in common than I had first thought. Maybe this was because I had changed a lot in Japan, or maybe it was because I had learned that being 'socially acceptable' and popular wasn't important because the people that are making those judgments are not always morally correct. I didn't really care who my friends were and who wasn't, but I did care that I was true to myself and refused to change to suit other people. I felt like I had found who I really was by losing everything that I had previously considered important.

The girl that I had grown closer to was Muslim, not that I thought of it at the time. One night we sat in McDonalds, taking advantage of their 'free refill coffee' offer and talked about religion, mainly in what way we believed in God. She was the one asking the questions mostly, about how I thought God to 'be'. I enjoyed the discussion and felt somehow that I might be making some sense to her with my 'Jenny Religion'. When we got home she got out the 40 Hadith Qudsi and read them for herself. She read some of them to me which of course got me interested. I asked to borrow the books from her so I could sit and read them all too, which I did. Reading the books in some ways was frightening. To me, examples of Islam could be found in TV news reports and in books such as 'Princess' and 'Not without my daughter'. Surely, I thought, the Hadith were just a good part of it, but the bad part was there too.

From there I moved back to my university for the start of semester and couldn't really get the books from my friend anymore so I started looking on the Internet. I had already 'met' some Muslims on the IRC but I considered them my friends too and that they wouldn't tell me the 'truth' about Islam. I thought that they would only tell me the good parts. I did ask them some questions though and *Masha'Allah* they were a great help. I still remember asking a Muslim guy whether he believed in angels. Angels were a part of my 'Jenny Religion' and I certainly didn't believe that a Muslim guy would admit to believing in the existence of Angels!! My limited and ignorant understanding of a Muslim male was one who beat his wife, killed female babies and was a terrorist in his spare time. This sort of person couldn't possibly believe in angels! I was shocked when he said 'Of course I believe in angels'. From then I was interested to know what else Muslims believed in.

I often think that I initially continued reading about Islam through the Internet to prove it wrong. I was always looking for that 'bad part'. Everybody couldn't have such a bad view of Islam if there was no reason for them to. I had always found a bad or an illogical part to every religion that I had read into, so why would Islam be different? I remember finding an Islamic chat site for the first time and expected to see suppressed females just reading what the males were saying. I expected them not to have an opinion, I expected the 'typical Muslim girl' that I had always felt sorry for. To my shock I saw girls happily chatting, with opinions that they were allowed to express. These Muslim girls were somehow more liberated than me.

My learning about Islam through the Internet continued through chatting to lots of people and printing out homepage after homepage. The more I learned the more scared I was. I didn't tell any of my friends that I was reading about Islam, not even my best-friend. At first it was because I didn't want them telling me only the 'good parts', and then even when I came to realize that I wasn't going to find any of the bad parts, I didn't want them to get their hopes up about me reverting to Islam. I wanted this 'decision' to be one that I made on my own - without pressure.

This 'decision' that I refer to wasn't really a decision at all. I am often asked 'What made you decide to become Muslim?', but when something as clear and logical as Islam is put in front of you, there is no choice. This is not to say that it made the decision to say *Shahadah* (The Testimony of Faith) any easier. There were many things that stopped me at first. Firstly I didn't think that I knew enough about Islam, but then it didn't matter because I knew that I would never find anything that was illogical or 'bad'. I came to realize that saying *Shahadah* is not the final step, but the first. *Inshallah* (by the will of Allah) I will continue to learn. The other thing that made me hesitant was separating the word 'Islam' from all the bad things that I had associated with it. I always thought that I couldn't possibly be Muslim!! To then learn that my 'Jenny Religion' and beliefs for example of God being One, was actually Islam was hard at first. Islam brought everything together, everything made sense. To me, finding Islam was like one big bus ride - I had stopped and had a look at all of the stops along the way, taken a bit from all of them, and continued on with the journey. When I found Islam I knew it was the 'last stop' of my long ride.

In October of 1997, my best friend came with me for me to say my *Shahadah* at an Islamic Centre in Melbourne (Jeffcott St). I was still scared at the time, but after one of the sisters going through the Articles of Faith, and me putting a mental tick next to each of them, I knew that there was nothing left to do but to say it with my mouth. I still cry when I think of the moment that I said 'Yes, I'll do it'. I finally dropped the mental wall that had been stopping me. I was to repeat in Arabic after the sister. With her first word I cried. It is a feeling that I can't explain. My friend was sitting beside but a little behind me, I didn't realize it then but she was already crying. I felt so much power around me and in the words, but I myself felt so weak.

Sometimes I think my family wonders if this is a phase I am going through.. just like my other phases. I was even vegetarian until my mum told me what was for dinner that

night - a roast. There is still so much for me to learn, but one thing that I would like people to understand is that I know *Alhamdulillah* (all praise is due to Allah) that Islam is a blessing for mankind. The more you learn, *Insha-Allah*, the more beauty you will see in Islam.

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