

Khadija Evans, Ex-Catholic, USA (part 1 of 2)

Description: American, Khadija Evans, who experimented with umpteen Christian denominations, atheism and even Wicca tells how her post-September 11 investigations of Islam led first herself then her husband to their final spiritual home.

By Khadija Evans

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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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