

Linda Delgado, Ex-Christian, USA (part 2 of 2)

Description: New experiences after embracing Islam.

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Published on 15 Sep 2008 - Last modified on 11 Jan 2012

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I also attended a "Fundamentals of Islam" class at the mosque when I could get away from my work. I was still a state police sergeant and it was difficult - no, impossible to cover. This became a source of real discontent and concern for me. Just eight months and I could retire, so I asked for and was granted the right to telecommute from my home three days a week doing planning and research projects.

After the first six months had passed, sisters at the mosque that I attended still hadn't warmed up to me. I was disappointed. I began to feel like an outsider. I was puzzled and concerned. I tried to become active in community services with a few sisters who had been friendly towards me. I looked for the kindness, friendship, and best of manners that were practiced each and every day by my Saudi boys. I made many mistakes at the mosque, such as talking in the prayer room as I tried to get up and down from the floor. I went to a community celebration and ate with my left hand; I wore clear nail polish on my trimmed nails and got scolded. I did wudu (ablutions) incorrectly and was frowned at. I became very discouraged.

Then one day I received a package in the mail from a sister-friend who I had met on the Internet. In the package were several abayas, hijabs, silk stockings, and a warm and friendly note welcoming me as her sister in Islam. She lives in Kuwait. Next a dear sister sent me a prayer robe and prayer rug she had hand-made herself. This dear sister lives in Saudi Arabia. I got an email that had a statement that I always remember at times when I get that "outsider" feeling. The note said: "I am glad that I became Muslim before I met many Muslims." This is not an insult. It was a reminder that Islam is perfect and it is we Muslims who are imperfect. Just as I have shortcomings, so may my sisters and brothers. I also began to understand what I personally believe to be one of the greatest gifts that Allah gave to the Muslims: the sister and brotherhood in Islam.

Over the past four years my life has changed dramatically. My family has come to accept with generosity and tolerance that I am Muslim and will remain Muslim. All thanks be to Allah for sparing me the trials of so many reverts who must deal with beloved family who strive to dissuade them from Islam.

Gradually, I made some sister friends locally and by cyber space, dozens of sister friends became my Muslim family bringing me support, love and friendship. It was close to my first year as a Muslim that I became ill with a series of life-threatening diseases. I clung tight to the rope of Islam and was grateful for the black seed tea and ZamZam water that my sister-friends sent me from around the world along with their daily du`aa' (supplications).

As my health continued to fail and I grew weaker physically, I had to discontinue community service work and became more isolated from the local Muslim community. I continued to work hard on my prayer, having great difficulty with the Arabic pronunciation but not giving up. My Islamic teacher made some cassette tapes, and a sister brought them to my home to help me. After two years, I had learned to recite four Surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an. This may seem like a small number to most Muslims, but for me it was a very big accomplishment. I set about learning the words for the other parts of prayer; another two years of struggle.

During the early part of my third year as a Muslim, I suffered a heart attack and had heart surgery. It was a sad time for me, as I knew that I would never again touch my head to the floor when praying, but would forever have to sit in my chair and pray. It was at this time that I truly understood the provision from Allah that Islam is the religion of ease. Praying while seated in a chair is acceptable; not fasting when one is sick is acceptable. I did not have to feel that I was less a Muslim because of these circumstances.

After visiting several mosques and observing that they were like mini United Nations, I began to see that the small groups within the mosque were mostly formed because of language and culture and not because of liking or disliking any person. I felt good that regardless of these differences, I could always count on a smile and an "As-Salaam' Alaykum!"

After a while, I began to gravitate towards sisters who are reverts to Islam like me. We have much in common - we experience many of the same trials, such as non-Muslim family members, difficulty pronouncing Arabic, being lonely on Muslim holidays, and not having a family member to break fast with during Ramadan. Sometimes our reversions meant losing life-long friends who just couldn't accept our new habits, or it was because of our discontinuance of activities common to non-Muslims, such as dancing and mixing in groups.

As I grew less able to do community services, I searched for some way to contribute to the greater Muslim community. I continually asked Allah for His help in this. One day, my young granddaughter suggested that I write books about my Saudi boys, Islam, and my family's experience with Islam. I decided to write the books and also include stories about a group of young girls, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who were friends. The stories would include the young girls' problems encountered at school and at home and I would use my knowledge of Islam as a guide for these book characters.

I began writing a book series that I called Islamic Rose Books. I created an e-group for sister authors and aspiring writers and this developed into the creation of the Islamic Writers Alliance. The Alliance is an international organization created to provide support for female Muslim authors and aspiring writers. Our main goal is to help each other promote our works to readers and publishers. I also decided to help two Muslim food banks by creating databases that help them to track their inventory, clients, and contacts and to create reports necessary for funding purposes. I decided that I would spend a large portion of my profits from book sales to buy books for Islamic children's libraries. I have discovered that many such libraries have lots of empty shelves where Islamic books

belong.

I still have much to learn about Islam. I never tire of reading the Qur'an and one of my favorite pastimes is reading about prominent, historical Islamic figures. When I am unsure about something in Islam, I look to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him). I see how he responded to situations and use this as my guide. My journey in Islam will continue, and I look forward to many new experiences. I thank Allah daily for His Mercy and Love.

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