

Michelle, Previously No Religion, Canada

Description: Growing up as a foster child, Michelle is amazed at the faith and patience of Muslims in times of adversity, eventually leading her to study and accept Islam.

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Hi and welcome, my name is Michelle and I converted to Islam. I live in Ontario, Canada, and this is my story about my journey to Islam.

My life before Islam was a constant struggle, unsure of who I wanted to be, haunted by many painful memories from my childhood, angry that I had missed out on what I considered a normal childhood, but always knowing in my heart there MUST be a reason that I had to go through it all but never being able to truly understand the reason. I wasn't raised with my family. I lived my childhood in other people's homes as I was a foster child from the age of about 6 or 7...celebrating with strangers who although had the desire to help me and surround me in a positive environment were still NOT my own family as much as these acts were out of love. I will always be thankful for those who opened their homes, families and hearts to me and I will always love them for it. I want to clarify that my family has always been a part of my life and I always had their love but I was a trouble child and they did what they thought was best for me, and I love them for that.

I never felt accepted as a child anywhere or as I went through the painful experience of adolescents, I felt like an alien and abnormal. As I look back I see that some of the BAD choices I made were out of desperation to feel accepted, to feel "normal" to convince myself that if I did what other people were doing that I would be accepted as one of them.

I never felt any real connection to any faith, since none called to my heart. I guess the simplest way to explain it is that I had no direction in terms of my spiritual well being, so I lived my life doing what I wanted, although the 'rebel' in me came out, I never desired to hurt anyone. I think also I was angry at GOD due to my painful childhood and had the lingering thought in my mind, 'what if I was being punished?' so I wanted no part in religion. I partied, drank and did everything that felt good and fun at the time.

As I grew up I started to realize that this was not the way to find answers about my life and my existence. I did attempt to find these answers but failed to do so and thought to myself that I won't find the answers. I even attended a non denomination church with one of my supervisors at my work and although I was thankful for her kindness and her guidance I still didn't feel that call to ALLAH. Then one day after much time had passed and I was no further in finding any peace or answers to my questions, a dear friend of mine sent me an email inviting me to join a social networking site and I thought it would be a fun way to meet new people. Unfortunately I made contact with some very bad people. My life spiraled out of control; as I was like this, I met some people who were

Muslims and are now close friends. We started to chat and started talking about the differences in our faith, culture and lives. I was amazed at the peace and tranquility they seemed to project and the undeniable faith they had in ALLAH. In spite of all the horrific challenges they still were there for me and listened when I was sick as I was suffering from chronic depression. I saw that although I had faced challenges in my life it paled in comparison to what they dealt with on a daily basis such as my friend who lives in Palestine and another who was from Iraq. They spoke with me about their daily struggles and past issues they had faced. I was amazed at the love and support they gave me. I loved them for it and I wanted to try and bridge any gaps we had in terms of our faiths, as I was not practicing but always did believe in ALLAH. This started my journey towards Islam. I watched videos and spoke with them about Islam - what it was, how it helped them in their lives, how they used it to live a peaceful life with courage and regarding their undeniable faith that although they faced challenges they would be rewarded for their faith and acts of kindness. I read online and did my best to try and obtain my information from reliable sources.

As I began to get a better idea about Islam and what it meant to live as a Muslim I wanted to know more and more. I felt deep down that this was the way for me, but I was apprehensive to profess my faith; mostly this was due to fear - not fear of judgment from others, since I knew I could accept that as I had dealt with that all my life; rather, it was fear of failure. I will try to explain in more detail.

I at that time had no intention of converting to Islam. I simply wanted to educate myself and to try my best to understand Islam. I had a huge amount of admiration and respect for Islam and those who followed this way of life. Muslims persevere and follow Islam in spite of the horrific challenges they face; there are so many misunderstandings and negative propoganda in the media especially since the September 11th attacks. I didn't think I would be able to cope with all of that, I didn't want to accept Islam and then leave it afterwards.

As time went by I was constantly surrounded by the fact that there is so much suffering, pain and despair in the world. It was tearing me apart knowing that my friends were facing horrible situations, and I could not sit by and do nothing. I wanted to try and do my small part to make the world a better place in a way I knew I could. After much thought, I finally concluded that I would accept Islam! I am now changing my life and living the Muslim life. I wanted to be closer to my Creator so that I may converse with Him - the one who knows my heart's desires for a better world free of oppression, fear and hate.

I hope that I can one day help to guide others to the path of Islam so they may feel the love of ALLAH and live a life that will fill them with love and peace just as it has done for me. It has been a painful journey but the reward far outweighs the pain and I am grateful for it. I still feel torn inside when I read what is happening to people all over the world, but now I feel less hopeless as I know that on the Day of Judgment all actions will be judged. This is a question I have struggled with all my life and I am thankful I have that assurance from my Creator. *Alhamdulillah* (all praise and thanks are due to God), our

Creator is Most Loving and Merciful. Thank you for coming with me on my journey to Islam...As *Salamu Alaikum*.

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