

## Molly Carlson, Ex-Christian, USA (part 2 of 2)

**Description:** Finally, how she felt that Islam was part of who she was long ago.

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My initial explorations into Islam began right after September 11, 2001. I was in my first semester of college and I was 18 years old.

I worked with a girl from Saudi Arabia. I tutored a Pakistani girl with a face veil, and I was friends with a guy from Palestine. All Muslims, of a varying degree, and all people I had never really questioned before, regarding their beliefs.

The girl I tutored, since then, became one of my closest friends on earth, and I would talk about her culture all the time. However, after 9/11, I began to question her more deeply about Islam and its beliefs.

My reasoning was that I knew these Muslim people, and none of them were terrorists, none of them were extremists. And I felt sorry that because of their religious affiliation, they were the targets of immense amounts of hatred; especially in the initial months after the attacks.

I wanted to know more in order to counsel my family and friends against hatred, and I wanted to know more because when you don't understand something you fear it.

I even went to the length of borrowing an abaya, hijab, and niqab from my Pakistani friend and wore them to both school and work to know exactly how differently I would be treated in these clothes than I was treated as a normal American girl on any other day.

The difference was extreme. It was harsh, and in some instances, even brought me to tears. My respect for my friend grew, and has not wavered at all in these years since. She was, and still is, my hero.

She and another very close friend of mine □ a man who is a convert himself and grew up in somewhat similar circumstances to my own □ were two of my biggest influences.

I would sit for hours upon hours with my convert friend talking about Islam □ why he converted, and how he converted, and all of the information he had to give to me, he gave freely.

He had asked the same questions I was asking and he knew their answers. If it were not for him, I would not be the Muslim I am today. My understanding of Islam grew steadily at a snail's pace over the next three and a half years.

I respected Islam, but I had never gotten to the point of actually thinking that I myself would become Muslim. And in the end, it would be the hardest decision of my life.

Here I enter into a point of my story that I sometimes tell and sometimes do not. It matters in the grand scheme of how I became Muslim, but when it comes to the bare bones of why I converted, it matters not at all. However, since I want to be honest with you, my readers, I feel that it is important to tell.

The very first question I get from other Muslims when they see my hijab is: "Are you Muslim?" And then 99% of the time the second question right after it is: "Are you married to a Muslim man?" The meaning being that I married a man who was Muslim and converted later under his influence.

To this I always say no, but to say that a man had nothing to do with it would be a lie. The final step towards my conversion was to become involved with a Muslim man. For his privacy, and out of respect for him, I will not talk much about it, but I feel it must be addressed.

This is because people who look at a woman or a man who has converted while either married or involved with a Muslim person, think that they did it for their significant others. I want to be a standing example that no, this is not always automatically how it is.

If I had converted for him, I would have married him when he came to me with a proposal, but I did not, and that was the second hardest decision of my life. He was not my destination, he was the door through which I needed to step. It was through him that I met some of the people who are the most important in my life, both as a person and as a Muslim.

The Osman family took me in without a second word. They didn't even reproach my boyfriend for bringing me to them, and I respect them for that and many other things. I remember the first night I met them, how "at home" I felt within their family, and how much a part of them I already was.

I think that the father knew, that God put the knowledge in his heart, that I was someone they needed to embrace. I can tell you, beloved readers, with 100% conviction that had I never known the Osman family, I would have never become the Muslim woman I am today, and that I would possibly never have embraced Islam.

Bhai-ji and his family were and are my greatest heroes, my greatest loves, my greatest influences, and my greatest teachers. To them I owe everything.

Four months after meeting them, sometime in early March 2005, and not long after that moment while driving in which I realized who I had become, I took Shahadah in their living room surrounded by people who loved me more than I will ever understand.

The feeling inside of me the moment after I swore to the truest belief I have ever had: "I testify that there is no God but God, and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of God," is a feeling I will never be able to describe in words.

It felt as if I were glowing so brightly from the inside that I would explode into tiny bits of light. I felt the hand of God inside me taking away my sins and making me new. The supreme happiness of that moment will live in me forever because I glimpsed paradise in

that eternal second.

I remember the moment I knew that everything had changed. I remember the moment in which everything did change. Throughout my life I was always the person that I am now, by the will of God, it just took me 22 years to get to where I could realize it.

Since that day, since that decision, I have never looked back. I have never regretted what I did because I have found more meaning and more pleasure in my life this past year and half, than I did in the 22 years leading up to it.

I would never be anyone other than who I am now. And that, my friends, is the true conversion of my soul.

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