

Shannon Abulnasr, Ex Christian, USA (part 1 of 3)

Description: In this part of her story of conversion, Shannon tells how she moved from the tiny country farm town she was born in to Irving, Texas, where she endeavoured a lot to know anything about her Creator and Islam, but merely got very little.

By Shannon Abulnasr

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I am from a tiny country farm town of only about 2,000 people in East Texas, and NO foreigners...meaning no Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists,nothing. Everyone in that town was Christian...predominantly Baptist.

My family was Christian, although not practicing, but I was raised with good morals as a Christian should have. However, I knew from the age of 6 that I was not a Christian because I was told that I had to believe that Jesus was the "son of God & was God". I didn't feel that I had to ask someone to negotiate my sins with God....so, I thought I was lost forever, because I was told that if I didn't believe this, that I was not a Christian.

I believed in God, and I believed in Jesus, but I just didn't see him 'as God'. I remember going to "Vacation Bible School" and asking questions and the only answer I was always given was "you just got to have faith!". I didn't accept that as an answer because I felt that religion and God shouldn't be that complicated that we as humans can't understand our creator and had to have blind faith.

It just left too many gaps for a person to 'not have faith' and be lost forever. Going to church just lost all its meaning for me because of this. In 2001 I started going back to church, but instead of going to a Baptist Church, I went to "Church of God". It was a more exhilarating experience, but one that was still lacking. This congregation was different from the Baptist congregation, as 80% of the time was spent singing hymns. I didn't see the point of that, and I thought it was strange. I just wanted to find God, but it just didn't happen even though I wanted it so much.

I reverted to Islam in May 2006 in Irving, Texas on the day after my 27th birthday. Ever since my sixth birthday, I have always asked God to guide me; although I found Islam, I never expected to find Allah the way I did!

How I found Islam:

I moved to a city about 30 miles away when I was in college of about 100,000 people, and still kind of isolated to other cultures and religions.

Only a handful of Muslims lived there as well as just a few Hindus. Any others were students at the university there. There were no international grocery stores or anything

for other ethnicities, therefore, the population of these minorities was prevented from growing larger.

I lived with a Hindu friend in 2002 for about a month when my apartment lease finished because I didn't want to sign a new lease, and I was trying to move to a bigger city (Dallas). During this month, I had a discussion with my Hindu friend about religion because they were asking me what my religion was. I wasn't so sure what I was...but I knew that I was not a Christian because I didn't believe Jesus was the "son of God". I didn't understand why I had to ask Jesus to forgive me if God was "All-Knowing". My natural logic told me that I should be able to just ask God directly, why should I have to ask Jesus to do it for me? All Christians had told me that if I didn't believe that Jesus was God, then I wasn't Christian. I didn't know about other religions so I didn't know where that left me. I thought I was Atheist and didn't have a religion. One day, my roommate asked me what my basic beliefs were, and when I mentioned them...they told me "you're a Muslim!" So, I was first told I was a Muslim by a Hindu...*SubhanAllah*.

They told me that they knew several Muslims that lived in our apartment complex (which served as a dormitory for international students of the college they were going to). I was later introduced to them and found out they were all from Algeria.

I learned I was allergic to something in my friend's apartment and had to move out. So, the Algerians offered to let me stay with them for a month or so. I did. During this time, it was Ramadan, and I fasted with them. So, my first Ramadan was in 2002 and I wasn't even "Muslim" at the time.

I actually learned very very little from them...as most of them were not really practicing themselves. I only saw one of them pray.....one time! I did not know at that time that they were not "practicing" Muslims, but looking back I feel really bad for them, as they would spend most of their time drinking and partying. In fact, there were over 50 Muslims in the nearby apartments, and out of them all, I only saw one of them pray, one time, in the entire time I knew them. Even during Ramadan, and I had five roommates! This saddens me since I know what it means to be a Muslim now. I did receive a copy of the Quran from one of them as a gift, but it was a tiny one and all in Arabic. I still have it to this day. This roommate was actually the only person that shared any knowledge with me about Islam, and told me that Muslims believed in Jesus and Mary as well. *Alhamdulillah*, at least one of them shared something with me!

Later, when I moved to Dallas, I didn't know a single person there. I was starting my life from scratch there. I wasn't so much into studying religion at that time, but eventually in 2005, I started studying because of an incident that happened to me one night.

Shannon Abulnasr, Ex Christian, USA (part 2 of 3)

Description: In this part of her story of conversion, Shannon relates how a couple of astonishing events pulled her towards Islam.

By Shannon Abulnasr

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Sadly, one night, I had been out partying and drinking, and was intoxicated. I had begun driving myself home but had to stop at a Hindu friend's store (a different friend than my first one) as I felt I couldn't drive any further safely. My friend was not there, but their employee was outside. I don't remember having any conversation but my friend informed me of what I had apparently said to their employee (who was also a Hindu). I was totally in disbelief and shock at what they said I was doing and saying. This employee said they saw me standing outside my car with my head on my folded arms crying against my car, and they approached me to ask me what was wrong and I didn't even notice they were there or talking to me. They said that when they approached me, while I was crying, I was talking in Arabic. I asked them how they knew it was Arabic if they didn't speak it, and they said because they heard me say "*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*" and they knew it was Arabic. However, they didn't know what it meant. I didn't know anything in Arabic either. Well, since neither of us knew what it meant, I just kind of moved on and didn't think much of it. I assumed they didn't know what they were talking about.

Time went by and nothing really happened, but one day maybe about a month or so later I was thinking about that night, and I looked at the Quran I had been given that was all in Arabic and wanted to know what it said. So, out of curiosity, I went and purchased a Quran that had the transliteration of the Arabic text and an English translation. I opened it to the first page and started reading. It took me a moment to figure out what the transliteration was, but when I tried reading the transliteration by sounding it out, I almost fainted because I heard myself say "*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*"! The first line of the Quran began with "*Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*". I was in complete shock because I remembered my Hindu friend telling me that I said those exact words. I began thinking a lot about this. How could I say these words if I didn't know what they were or even what language it was? I had never heard them before except from my Hindu friend. At this point I decided to start learning more about Islam because that was just too odd to look past. I feel it was a signal from Allah to show me the truth and to change my ways.

I began studying a little here and there, and I just knew that this was really what I believed in. I didn't really know how to convert or anything, but it was already in my heart. I met some Muslims in Dallas, but they were men. I didn't know any Muslim women. I asked my Muslim friends to take me to the mosque because I had never been to one and although I wanted to go, I didn't want to go alone. They all told me that they couldn't take me and I didn't understand why. They said they would have to find a

woman to take me, but no one ever followed through or took me seriously. I then asked them to teach me how to pray...same thing, no one took me serious.

More time goes by, and in the end of 2005, I had purchased a restaurant and during the spring of 2006 I was defrauded by a person that was trying to "steal" my restaurant from me because I wouldn't sell it to them. It was a totally devastating for me because I was losing everything I worked really hard for and couldn't stop the man that was trying to steal it right out from under me. I was having a nervous breakdown one day because I was having other issues compounding my agony. I was crying all day long, and I wanted to talk to a professional counselor. I didn't go to my restaurant that day, and stayed at home because I was an emotional roller coaster of tears and anger. I knew that if I didn't talk to someone that I might hurt or even kill myself because all my issues piled up together were extremely overwhelming. I was thinking in my heart that it was wrong for me to kill myself...I believed I was created by God, but didn't know what to do. I asked God to please show me what He wanted me to do, because I was lost and couldn't find my way anymore because I knew I couldn't get through this by myself.

I got the phone book out and called many psychologists, and psychiatric doctors' offices but no one could see me without an appointment and even if I made an appointment, the earliest appointment was more than a month away. No one was available to talk to me on the phone either. I told the secretary that answered the phone at one of these clinics that if I didn't talk to someone "today" that I might do something dangerous because I had reached the end of my rope. She told me to call a number that she gave me and that someone there should be able to counsel me over the phone. She didn't tell me what the number was for. I thought it was just a hotline number. I called it and a woman named Jameelah answered the phone right away. I didn't know what company/organization she was with, and didn't ask, because she answered right away. She asked me if I could come to her office that same day, and I told her I could and when she gave me directions, I realized she gave me directions to a mosque. I asked her if it was correct because a mosque was at that location. She responded in the affirmative and informed me that she worked there. I was nervous to go alone, and I asked her if she could meet me outside, which she did. I was once again amazed at the chain of events that led me back to Islam. *SubhanAllah*.

Shannon Abulnasr, Ex Christian, USA (part 3 of 3)

Description: In this part of her story of conversion, Shannon tells us how she converted and how she feels about those who had the opportunity to share the knowledge of Islam with her but simply ignored it.

By Shannon Abulnasr

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I sat down and talked to Sr. Jameelah for several hours in her office at the Islamic Center of Irving. I cried the entire time I was there. Sr. Jameelah also cried and when I asked her why she was crying, she said she felt like she was looking at herself, because we had similar problems in our lives, and had many, many of the same things in our past history. But when I was there, the emotional feelings that were making me cry turned into different emotions. I realized that my emotions had calmed and I really felt at peace. I had made this self discovery when she had to leave her office to take care of something. I was thinking to myself that it was so strange to have met a woman like her, just by "chance", and that this was destined for me to meet her in particular, of all people. She was an American Muslim woman, with a similar story to mine. I am sure now, looking back, that no one would have understood my problems and issues better than her, because she had been through many of the same things I experienced. I went out immediately and found her in the lobby of the masjid talking to a school teacher about her daughter, and right then, I told her I wanted to become Muslim. When I told her that, she smiled broadly and she told me to come with her after handing me a hijab and helping me pin it and putting it on. She then took me to a classroom of about 30-40 young children between 5-10 years of age and told the teacher that I wanted to become Muslim and thought it would be nice to have the kids witness my conversion. She asked him to recite the shahada to me. I was crying before, during, and after reciting the shahada, and was overwhelmed with feelings of happiness. I was crying so many tears, that everything was blurry, but then a little boy approximately six years old stood up and came to me and told me that I shouldn't be crying because I've not only found a new religion, but also a beautiful way of life. *SubhanAllah*. I am crying just remembering this ! This young boy, inshaAllah, will grow up to be a very pious man. I just wish I remember who the little boy was.

At the time, all I knew about the man that helped me recite my shahada was a teacher. Several months later, I discovered he was the Quran teacher at the Quranic School in the Masjid. This man was Sheikh Abdelkarim Edghouch. After my reversion, I began taking classes at the masjid, and attending the prayers. I began wearing hijab, and the rest is history.

Something else interesting is that on that day, I felt that I was guided directly to Sr. Jameelah in more than one way. The woman on the phone gave me the number and didn't tell me it was a masjid first off. Secondly, anytime you call the Islamic Center of Irving, you are answered by an automated menu asking you who you want to talk to. On the day that I called, I never got that message, it went directly to Sr. Jameelah, and to this day, we can't figure out how that happened. Allah only knows what I would, or would not have done if I had received a voicemail, or worse, no answer that day. *SubhanAllah*.

Today, I am thankful to Allah for giving me the road signs to find Him. I feel embarrassed that I was lost for so long. Now I look back to see all the Muslims that I had met before I met Sr. Jameelah and I sadly realize that they had so much to share with me but were selfish, lazy, and stingy and didn't take the time to teach me about Islam. May

Allah have mercy on them.

So many Muslims had the opportunity to share this beautiful religion with me but chose to dismiss me as "not serious". If they only knew! Allah is the only one who knows the heart of a person and their intentions, and will guide them. So, if someone ever asks you anything about Islam, tell them everything you know. If they ask you questions that seem "silly" or "stupid", don't disregard them, as they may be seriously enquiring about Islam. Some people don't have a way with words, and they usually are not intending to be rude, or insulting. They are just ignorant on the subject and don't know how to ask. Many Muslims get offended easily when a non-Muslim asks questions, and then don't want to talk to them anymore because they feel disrespected. I've had this happen to me...even after I reverted. I had no intention to be offensive...it was strictly just ignorance of the topic. Think about it... if you know nothing about it, then you wouldn't know if you are being offensive or not. Remember this when you are talking to non-Muslims because your reaction to their curiosity, just might be what turns them away from Islam.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I pray to Allah that He guides us all and protects us from falling into disbelief.

Ameen.

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