

AAMINAH HERNANDEZ, EX-CHRISTIAN, USA (PART 2 OF 2)

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Description: Reflections of an American woman. Part 2

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With my son's father in prison, I tried to become more responsible and put my life in order for my son's sake. I began to attend church with my mother. A few months after my brother came home to visit, he returned with a wife in full veil, and months later she was pregnant with their first son. I wanted to like my new sister-in-law, but I think in retrospect that I was ashamed of my own ways and for that reason could not accept her modesty. May Allah bless her for her patience and willingness to continue to share Islam with me despite my attitude towards her. My brother also brought a friend home to talk with my mother about Islam. This was the first Muslim man besides my brother that I met and I remember his visits brought out a side of me I had not known existed. This Muslim man always struck me as bright white. I know now that it was because he had nur (light, shining) in his face, though I was too shy to look at him directly. Every time he visited, I found myself running to cover my half clothed body. To this day I make du`aa' (supplication) for this brother's safety and well-being as he made such an impression on me, but I have never seen him since. I had by that time met a man who seemed nice and responsible and I was dating him. My brother and his wife moved in with my mother, son and I, and my new fiancé visited every day. A few months before my nephew was born my brother and his wife moved to their own apartment and I had thoroughly worked my poor sister-in-laws nerves to the point that we could no longer maintain contact. I then married my fiancé and moved from my mother's house as well.

After my nephew's birth and my marriage, I began to visit with my brother and his wife. I was moved by the peacefulness of their home and family life. My sister-in-law sought to make my son and I comfortable when we visited, and began to tell me a bit more about Islam. My husband did not like my brother and made disparaging comments to his face and behind his back that shamed me. This caused strife in my marriage and I began to spend a lot of time at my brother's house since my husband did not allow me to work. Over time I found myself interested in my sister-in-law's covering and began to understand the comfort she must feel, maintaining her privacy. I was also able to determine that the fabric used was not oppressive or hot as I had always expected.

When I suggested to my husband that I might like to cover, he scoffed at me. He had always encouraged me to wear revealing clothing, and I think it made him feel good to have a "sexy" wife, but I did not feel respected. After only a few months of marriage, and only a week after our baptism in the church, he revealed to me that he was having

an affair and no longer wanted to be married. Again, my life was in shambles and I moved my son and I back to my mother's house.

Of course, I then spent even more time with my sister-in-law. My brother and his wife were the only people supportive of me after my husband kicked me out. The church we attended told me there was always a reason that a man would have an affair and that it was a shortcoming of the wife. They also told me that I should not look for work or leave his home, even though he had told me to leave, as I was sinning by creating a life without him instead of being patient waiting for him to return. The church did not offer to pay for my son's food or clothing or diapers so that I could wait for "God to move my husband's heart", they only judged me and this made me very cynical. My brother and his wife understood that I needed to look after my son and that my marriage was over. They offered their home to me and my sister-in-law offered to babysit so that I could work. They took the time to explain to me the Islamic views on marriage, divorce and women's rights. I was greatly surprised to discover that this so-called masochistic religion was in fact more realistic and understanding of my plight than my church had been.

Unfortunately, before I could tell my brother that I was ready to live with him, he and his family were forced to leave town very unexpectedly. After they settled down, my sister-in-law wrote to me and we began to maintain contact. After only a few more months, with my life still a complete mess, I decided that I was fed up trying to live my own way. I found my brother's former employer, who was Muslim, and begged him to take my son and I to my brother's home. He happily complied, also giving me a Qur'an to read on the way. This brother was so kind and respectful to me, and very thoughtful of my son. He offered to marry me, but I was shocked by this and asked for time to be with my brother. He delivered me to my brother with no hard feelings and went back to his business.

Living with my brother and his wife proved to be more of a challenge than I expected and we were terribly poor. But I took my shahadah (Testimony of Faith) and lived in a town where I heard the adhan (call to prayer) called five times a day and was surrounded by Muslims. There were a lot of problems too, but I always remember how beautiful it was and I miss those days. My brother and his wife taught me how to make wudu' (ablution), how to pray, how to be mindful of God., and nearly everything else I needed to know to begin to live as a Muslim.

Eventually, I had to come home to find work and provide better life for my son. I stopped wearing hijab and niqab (face veil) and did what I had to do to find work. I had made some basic moral improvements and proudly stated that I was a Muslim, but I found it very hard to live as one. My town does not have a tight-knit community, and unfortunately, my pre-Islam past was leaked out and sisters were not willing to speak to me. *Alhamdulillah*, I found a job where I had access to the internet and began to look up information about Islam and purchase books. This also led to me purchasing hijabs, and eventually niqabs, although my employer refused to allow me to wear hijab. Online I made many Muslimah friends and built my own little community. I also found a

new husband. Due to my own impatience and particularly strict views, that marriage also quickly failed and I left him. After leaving my husband, I again gave up hijab and niqab and began to live a little wildly. I hid it well, but I did not live Islamically at all for a time. To this day, I wonder what better turn my life might have taken if I had stayed with that husband, but Allah apparently had other plans for me.

Again, I met a man. He was kind and gentle and generous and I fell in love. But he was not Muslim. I was honest with him that I was Muslim and could only marry a Muslim. I began to wear hijab again and he accepted this. He was willing to accept Islam and took his shahadah and we married. After some time, I again was blessed to find a job with internet service and built up a community of sisters again. I finally began to do what I had always wanted to do: write. With the support of sisters on-line, I even began to write Islamic stories and articles. My employer also appreciated the Islamic viewpoint that I brought to our social service work, as well as the integrity I brought to the office. They were pleased that I wore hijab and supported me, in-as-much as non-Muslims can.

Although I continue to strive hard, it is not always easy. I struggle like anyone else and my faith sometimes seems like it may falter. But I try to remember that everything is in Allah's Hands and that as long as I am struggling against my own nafs (human self) and obeying Him, He protects me. I am blessed to have a lot of Muslimah friends all over the world, and hope, insha'Allah, to someday move to a stronger community of believers. It is impossible for me to forget that Allah used my own younger brother to bring me to the truth, and I recognize this blessing is unique. Although my parents are unwilling to hear about Islam, I know that I am blessed to have family that I can share this gift with. I make du`aa' that through my writing I glorify Allah and encourage others to seek His Path—the only true path to happiness and a good life—Islam.

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