

VIVIANA ESPIN, EX-CHRISTIAN, ECUADOR

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Description: An Ecuadorian female finds Islam.

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My name is Viviana Espin. I am 21 years old from Ecuador.

Life always has good and bad moments. Sometimes when I think about the past I feel a deep hole of pain. I'd like that things would have been different, maybe to have a normal family, maybe caring parents. I don't know, but I am sure everything has a reason.

My childhood was so hard, my father was a violent man, my mother was very submissive, we had financial problems, and many other things that were influencing my brother and my own mental health. In my childhood, my mom used to teach me at home some vowels, some words in English, and other things, I became so good at learning that at the age of 4, my mom decided to send me to school.

My parents sent me to study in a Catholic school. My mom liked it because she liked me to get good faith in God and also a good education. My father liked it too because this was one of the best schools in the city we lived in, and he always had been arrogant and vain so he liked to be proud with his friends telling them were I was studying.

Since the beginning, I was younger than my classmates, so they used to abuse me. They used to put bubble gum in my hair and steal my things, throw my food in the garbage and many other things.

As I was the youngest, the principal of the school decided to take care of me. So in the break time I didn't spend it in the yard with the other kids. I used to spend this time in the office of the principal or the secretary of the school. By the way, since it was a Catholic school, almost all the teachers, principal, and directors were nuns.

I started to get very close to them and they also started to appreciate me so much, that they started to let me stay with them in their homes, which already was in the land of the school. They had their house beside the school building inside the same perimeter of land.

I already was different than the rest of my neighbors and kids of my age.

My parents were divorced when I was almost 8 years old, this by far was one of the most traumatic events of my life. When I spend so much time alone in a closed place, my mind starts to fly and I start to think about things that sometimes I don't find answers to.

My mom became more religious, but she started to control me so much. Sometimes it was good, and sometimes it wasn't. I grew up always with fear, insecurity and doubts.

I started to appreciate the calm places with less noise around, but in a way to be in touch with nature. Those were the only moments I liked to be alone.

The only place in which I used to find that, was with the nuns. The school had a big green yard, so I used to lay on it and enjoy looking at the sky and feeling the wind covering me. This felt so peaceful.

The nuns appreciated me so much and I enjoyed the time with them. I also felt that the only way I could have an escape from the problems of my home, was through seeking refuge in God.

At the age of 12, I told my mom that I liked to stay in the convent with the nuns of my school and be one of them.

My mom got upset and said that she was happy that I wish to be close to God but at the same time she said that her wish is that I give her grandchildren someday, so she didn't let me join the nuns. It was already my last year with the nuns.

After the negative answer from my mom, I decided to get closer to God, study and understand better what the Bible says. After I started to read it consciously, I realized that it has many things that didn't make sense, many contradictions, and in some parts there were things that seemed to me as if the idea was not complete. So I got the need to know where was the rest, and the answers to my inquires that, in my view, were not clear, nor logical.

I started to read books about religions, and the Internet also was so helpful to search.

I found information about Judaism, Buddhism, Agnosticism, Hinduism and Christianity itself, and different sects and so on. None of them satisfied my logic. I already was not interested in searching about Islam because of all the bad things I heard about it. But at the end, I decided to check out Islam to see what it is all about as my final option to try to find a logical answer.

The Trinity was never clear to me. So when I started to investigate into Islam I saw the answers to many of my questions. Islam made sense to me, it answered my question about the number of Gods, it clearly stated in the Quran that there was only One. This

answered my questions about Jesus. I understood that the Bible had been changed and no longer was in its pristine form and I felt that finally I had found the truth.

I read briefly about Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and I found him very close to Moses. Why shouldn't I believe in a last messenger from God when he had the same message that all the other prophets came with? All this made me feel that finally I had found the real religion.

I was perhaps 17 or 18, I don't remember, when I told my mom that I had the wish to change my religion and become Muslim. I told her that I liked to go to the Islamic Center at my city and learn more. My mom got upset and she said that only Christian people can live in her home, and if I was seriously thinking about changing my religion, I should leave the house. So I told her that I was only kidding to make her forget the issue.

She contacted my aunt, and my aunt brought me a book against Islam. I read the book and it scared me and left in my mind fears and doubts. So I stopped the idea of becoming Muslim but also I didn't like to go back to Christianity because I already didn't feel comfortable with it before.

My mom changed her religion from Catholic to Evangelic, after a miracle with one of her brothers. He had cancer and doctors said that he was not going to live more than a week maybe one month. Two years passed since then and my uncle is still with us.

The day when my mom decided to convert I already tried to talk to her about Islam again, and I asked her to come with me to the Islamic Center to ask about the doubts and fears from the book. My mom was so open that day and she accepted. But that was in the morning. At night, she went back home as Evangelic and with a very strong conviction about it, so for me it was impossible to talk to her about Islam again. A few months after this I met a Muslim who I got married to shortly afterwards, after this I moved to Egypt to be with him.

The two biggest dreams of my life were to come to Egypt and to marry a good man who loves me, cares for me, and be romantic, the charming kind of prince that I am sure all girls dream about when they are children. But I always thought that I was never going to see these dreams come true. Because on one hand, of my financial situation would make it impossible to travel to Egypt and on the other hand, I didn't think that the man I wished for could be anywhere in the real world except my dream.

God gave me all what I wished. But honestly, I was never grateful for all that He gave me.

After coming to Egypt, I still was not sure that I wanted to convert. My new husband introduced me to a wonderful lady with the knowledge, the patience, and the faith. Her name was Raya. She helped me better analyze my situation and clarified all the doubts and misconceptions I used to have about Islam.

Finally I took the *Shahadah* on Saturday August 30, 2009. I took the *Shahadah* only because I was convinced about the existence of One God and that Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, was his last Messenger and Prophet. But I said that I was going to start practicing when I feel it's the right time. They agreed with me and at that time I didn't have the intention to start a real learning soon.

The following Monday everything changed. My husband and I got into a really bad situation which was my fault, and he divorced me. I felt that my world was crushed in pieces.

In my despair I didn't know who else to ask for help other than Raya. Since that day she has been giving me her support and has taken me as a daughter in her home.

My mom used tell me that humans never learn until bad things happen. This is very true. All the problems with my husband made me feel the need to search for help in Allah (God) and ask him for forgiveness.

I am just in the starting process but I have the real feeling that I want to serve my Lord and be grateful to him. I started to change my way of dressing and now I wear hijab, and I feel I want to change all my life. I want to prove to God, to the man I love and to myself, that I am a new person now.

After the divorce, thank God, my husband has given me a light of hope that with God's help we could be back together soon.

Now I need to get strong in my religion and he needs time to forgive me. In all ways, I hope that at the end of this year God gives me the strength that I need to accept any decision from Him.

It was a lesson that has changed all my life for sure.

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