

LYNDA FITZGERALD, EX-CATHOLIC, IRELAND (PART 1 OF 4)

Rating: 3.5

Description: Feeling lonely and wanting something new in life, Lynda accepts a job offer in Saudi Arabia.

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Introduction

Lynda Fitzgerald, now known as Khadija, is an Irish girl from a town called Wicklow, close to Dublin. She hails from a very strict Roman Catholic family, comprising of nine children. Her father is an Electrician and her mother a Housewife.

Lynda was educated in Wicklow and then went on to Secretarial College. She has worked in Dublin for nine years.

Khadija, as she is now called, reverted to Islam, after having come to Saudi Arabia. She relates, in this article, the sequence of events that brought her to this Holy Land and introduced her to the right path. May God Bless her.

How I Came To Saudi Arabia

I was in a young people's club. We would meet every Monday and then go to the pub afterwards. Sometimes I went, but mostly I went home after the meetings. One night, a new girl had started in the club, and I decided to go to the pub to talk to her and make her feel welcome. It turned out that she worked for a recruiting agency that recruited for Saudi Arabia. She started to tell me all about it. I was fascinated. I had hardly even heard of Saudi Arabia before that. As the night went on I got more and more interested and by the time I left the pub I really wanted to go to Saudi.

I applied for a job that year, 1993 but I didn't get it. So, I didn't think about it for a while. I went home for Christmas and was very bored, and I decided I just had to do something different with my life. All my friends had boyfriends or were married and had moved on to different things. I suddenly found myself with no ties. When I went back to the city after Christmas, I rang that girl in the recruiting agency and asked her to put me forward for any job that came up in Saudi Arabia. She said 'You won't believe it. I just got a fax from the Security Forces Hospital looking for a secretary'. I was here by 15 March 1994.

My First Impressions of Islam

When you come to Saudi Arabia the first thing the other Westerners will tell you is how terrible the Muslims are, how badly they treat their women, how they all go off to pray and don't come back for hours, how they all go to Bahrain to drink and pick up women. You're prejudiced right from the start...and you think that's Islam. But it's not Islam. Unfortunately the majority of westerners fail to see that.

How I Changed That View

For me, I was curious from the start. I'd see the people praying in the mosque, and I thought it was great to have such strong faith to worship God so much. I would see leaflets lying around and pick them up to read them, but then my Western friends would say "what do you want to read that for, they're only trying to brainwash you," and I was embarrassed and I stopped doing it. Then I started taking Arabic lessons and the Arabic teacher, an Egyptian guy, really impressed me. He was so different from a lot of the Muslims I'd met. His faith was so strong. I got friendly with him because I was having some trouble with a Muslim guy in work and I needed someone to talk to about it. I would get all upset and blame it all on Islam, and he would be really patient and explain things to me, and he helped me to see that it wasn't Islam and that not all Muslims behaved like this.

Another thing the Westerners will tell you is that all the Muslims want to do is revert you, and that they'll try and brainwash you. So, of course, you're very wary if anyone tries to talk to you about Islam, and you put up a wall between you and them, and you won't listen to anything that they tell you. So, with Khaled, he never talked about Islam unless I brought up the subject first, or I incorrectly blamed something on Islam; and sometimes I would practically attack him unfairly about something that had nothing whatsoever to do with Islam. He always remained calm and was very patient and it was very clear that he just wanted me to know the truth, he just wanted me to see that I was being unfair and I had been misinformed.

Then it was Ramadan. A lot of the Saudi guys in work were moaning and complaining "we can smell food, you guys shouldn't be eating in your offices, you should have more respect for us". I couldn't understand why I couldn't even have a cup of water on my desk, after all they were supposed to be making a sacrifice for God, they shouldn't care if I had a cup of water on my desk. The following extract from my diary shows how I felt at the beginning of Ramadan.

"It's Ramadan. My goodness, what a month. It's so annoying. You can't even mention the word food. They're all going around like mega martyrs and most of them aren't even working. They only have to do six hours a day so they just stay up all night and eat and make the rest of us feel like complete pagans during the day."

My friend, Khaled, tried to explain some of it to me. He explained about praying late at night and trying extra hard to be good and not use bad language or [complain] or backbite and how you had to give more in charity. He said that some westerners tried fasting to see what it was like, and some of them liked it so much that they did it every year. One morning I woke up and I decided, I'm going to fast. So I did. I didn't tell anyone about it, not even Khaled, at first, but he realized it himself eventually.

One day, I went to see him and he said he had something he wanted me to read. He brought a copy of the Quran to show me a passage about Jesus (PBUH) and when he put it in my hands it was like he had given me a precious piece of crystal. I felt awed. I didn't want to give it back to him, but I felt stupid and I was afraid he'd laugh if I told him how I felt. So I gave it back to him but it burned inside me for days until finally he actually said it to me himself "why don't you read the Quran" and it was like a weight was lifted from my shoulders and I brought it home and started reading it that night.

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