

LYNDA FITZGERALD, EX-CATHOLIC, IRELAND (PART 3 OF 4)

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Description: Lynda discusses her internal battle about wearing the Hijab.

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Changing My Job

There had been a freeze on recruitment at my hospital, and then in June they suddenly opened up for recruitment, and there were two jobs that I could go for. One was in the Personnel Department, and the other was in the Education and Training Department. I had a choice of both jobs, and both Directors were really pushing me to take their department. If I went to the Personnel Department I would be right in the middle of things, and I would know everything that was going on in the hospital, and I would have more chance of getting a pay rise in the future. If I went to Education, I knew there was more chance that people would find out about me being a Muslim, and I would have to start covering my head. For weeks I worried and fretted about what to do. Suddenly it became very important for me to be in the middle of things and to know what was going on in the hospital and to be in such a strong position, but still something was stopping me. Finally my Jordanian friend told me to say two extra Raka's after my prayer in the evening and to ask for God's guidance. I did that for days and it just didn't seem to be working. I think I knew that I had to go to Education but there was a constant battle going on inside me, I was afraid of people finding out, I was afraid of having to face them and thoughts kept creeping into my head about what a powerful position I'd be in if I went to Personnel. Then, one night I was reading the Quran, and it occurred to me that all those things didn't mean anything to me, money, gossip, power. They never had. So why had they suddenly become so attractive and I thought, it's Shaytaan trying to convince me, because he knows if I go to Education, then I'd have more support, because there were more Muslims in the department, and I'd get more involved in the religion. And it was like a cloud had lifted, and I made up my mind, and I couldn't wait for the next day to come so that I could tell my boss my decision. Of course, I went to Education.

Wearing the Hijab

After that things moved pretty rapidly. I started going to the mosque to pray and I had a lot of support in the Education department. Then my boss, who is (strictly religious), found out and started pressing me to cover my head. So I had to think about it

seriously. I didn't want to do it for the wrong reason. I wanted to do it because I was ready and when I knew that I could put it on and never take it off again. Then my boss went on Holidays, and I felt the pressure was off me, but still I was thinking about it all the time. I had constant arguments with my friend about wearing it and the reason why and I still wasn't convinced.

One weekend, I was at a friend's house on the compound, and some new girls had arrived and I got talking to them. They were really nice, and I felt I could be friends with them, but then I thought, 'OK, new people are coming and it is only going to get harder and harder. Maybe if they see me with the hijab from the start, then they will accept it and not question it as much.' I decided to start wearing it the next day. Here's an extract from my diary:

"So I think I'm going to cover my head tomorrow. One half of me feels it's the right time, the other half is screaming at me not to. I'm trying to ignore that half. It's just so hard to know what to do. What if I hate it after a day, or a week; or I realize I made a mistake after a week or a month. There's no turning back, not unless I want to lose all respect. When am I ever going to be 100% sure, when will I ever be any more sure than this. I have to take that chance, I have to believe that if it's what God wants, then I'll get through it.

I'm having a panic attack now. Help! Do I really believe in this religion? Do I really want to live my life like this? Do I want to spend every night and every weekend alone? Help! Help! Help! Oh God, why is this so hard? Why am I such a wuss? 29 years of age and still acting like a 5 year old. How have I made decisions in the past when I can't seem to get it together on this one at all? I'm not even a really good person, I have to work hard at being even half way good. Right now, I'd like to get out of this country, go to a disco, dance wildly, get drunk, scream, shout, and sing. Can I face the rest of my life knowing I can't drink, can't have a boyfriend, and can't go outdoors without covering my head. If Kate was here right now, I think I'd ring her and ask her to make me a margarita. But she's not! I think the Devils working overtime on me right now. And people think I'm a sensible person you know. It'd make you laugh, wouldn't it?

I'm determined I'm going to do it. I've got to do it. At least, if nothing else, I might come to my senses and realize what a fool I am, at most I'll realize that I made the right decision, and I'm on the right track – enshallah [God-willing]."

I didn't sleep a wink that night. Right up to the last minute I didn't think I'd have the courage to do it. But just before I went out the door I put it on. I never looked back.

It was like all the doubts were gone. It was like Shaytaan had left me. I felt proud. I felt like I was walking ten feet tall. I wanted everyone to know that I was a Muslim. I was proud to be a Muslim. I knew that I had made the right decision and I would never regret it. Subhan Allah [May God be glorified], He made it very easy for me.

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