

CRAIG ROBERTSON, EX-CATHOLIC, CANADA (PART 1 OF 2): FROM BAD TO WORSE

Rating: 3.2

Description: After being raised in a Catholic household and spending much of his early childhood attending church, Craig rejects faith and takes to life in the fast lane.

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My name is Abdullah Al-Kanadi. I was born in Vancouver, Canada. My family, who were Roman Catholics, raised me as a Roman Catholic until I was 12 years old. I have been Muslim for approximately six years, and I would like to share the story of my journey to Islam with you.



I suppose in any story it's best to start from the beginning. During my childhood I attended a Catholic religious school and was taught about the Catholic faith, along with other subjects. Religion was always my best class; I excelled academically in the teachings of the Church. I was pressed into service as an 'altar boy' by my parents from a very young age, which pleased my grandparents a great deal; but the more I learned about my religion, the more I questioned it! I have this memory from my childhood, I asked my mother on Mass: "Is our religion the right one?" My mother's answer still rings in my ears to this day: "Craig, they are all the same, they're all good!" Well to me this didn't seem right. What was the point of me learning my religion if they were all equally good!?

At the age of twelve, my maternal grandmother was diagnosed with colon cancer and died a few months later, after a painful battle with the disease. I never realized how deeply her death affected me till later on in life. At the tender age of twelve, I decided I would be an atheist in order to punish God (if you can even fathom such a thing!) I was an angry little boy; I was angry at the world, at myself and worst of all, at God. I stumbled through my early teenage years trying to do everything I could to impress my new "friends" in public high school. I quickly realized that I had a lot to learn, for being sheltered in a religious school you don't learn what you would in a public school. I pressed all my friends in private to teach me about all the things I did not learn, soon enough I gained the habit of swearing and making fun of people weaker than me. Even though I tried my best to fit in, I never actually did. I would get bullied; girls would make fun of me and so on. For a kid my age, this was devastating. I retreated to myself, into

what you would call an 'emotional shell'.

My teenage years were filled with misery and loneliness. My poor parents tried to talk to me, but I was belligerent towards them and very disrespectful. I graduated from high school in the summer of 1996 and felt that things would have to change for the better, since I believed they couldn't get any worse! I was accepted in a local technical school and decided that I should further my education and maybe make some good money, so that I would be happy. I took a job at a fast-food restaurant by my house to help pay for school.

A couple of weeks before I was to start school, I was invited to move out with some friends from work. To me, this seemed like the answer to my problems! I would forget my family and be with my friends all the time. One night, I told my parents I was going to move out. They told me, I couldn't, and that I wasn't ready for it and that they wouldn't allow it! I was 17 years old and very headstrong; I swore at my parents and said to them all sorts of evil things, which I still regret to this day. I felt emboldened by my new freedom, I felt released, and I could follow my desires as I saw fit. I moved in with my friends and didn't speak to my parents for a long time after that.

I was working and going to school when my roommates introduced me to marijuana. I was in love with it after the first 'puff!' I would smoke a bit when I got home from work to relax and unwind. Soon though, I started to smoke more and more, until during one weekend I had smoked so much, that it was Monday morning and before I knew it, it was time for school. I thought, well, I'll take one day of school off, and go the next day, since they won't possibly miss me. I never returned to school after that. I finally realized how good I had it. All the fast food I could steal and all the drugs I could smoke, who needed school anyways?

I was living a great life, or so I thought; I became the 'resident' bad boy at work and consequently the girls started to pay attention to me like they hadn't in high school. I tried harder drugs, but *alhamdulillah*, I was saved from the really terrible stuff. The strange thing was, when I wasn't high or drunk I was miserable. I felt worthless and completely valueless. I was stealing from work and from friends to help maintain the 'chemical haze'. I became paranoid of the people around me and imagined police officers were chasing me around every corner. I was beginning to crack and I needed a solution, and I figured that religion would help me.

I remember seeing a movie about witchcraft and I thought that would be perfect for me. I bought a couple books on Wicca and Nature Worship, and found that they encouraged the use of natural drugs so I continued. People would ask me if I believed in God, and we would have the strangest conversations while under the 'influence', but I distinctly remember saying that no, in fact I don't believe in God at all, I believe in many gods as imperfect as me.

Through all this, there was one friend who stuck by me. He was a 'Born Again' Christian and was always preaching to me, even though I would mock his faith at every

opportunity. He was the only friend I had at the time who didn't judge me, so when he invited me along to go to a youth weekend camp I decided to go along. I had no expectations. I thought I would have a huge laugh making fun of all the "Bible Thumpers". During the second evening, they had a huge service in an auditorium. They played all sorts of music which praised God. I watched as the young and old, male and female cried out for forgiveness and shed tears over everything. I was really moved and I said a silent prayer along the lines of "God, I know I have been a horrible person, please help me, and forgive me and let me start fresh." I felt a surge of emotion come over me, and I felt tears roll down my cheek. I decided at that moment to embrace Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I raised my hands in the air and started dancing around (yes, dancing!) All the Christians around me were staring at me in stunned silence; the guy who mocked them and told them how stupid they were for believing in God, was dancing and praising God!

I returned to my party home and eschewed all drugs, intoxicants, and girls. I promptly told my friends how they needed to be Christians so they could be saved. I was shocked that they rejected me, because they always used to pay attention to me before. I ended up moving back with my parents after a long absence and used to badger them with the reasons why they should become Christian. They being Catholic felt they were already Christian, but I felt they were not, for they worshipped Saints. I decided to move out again but this time on better terms and was given a job by my grandfather who wanted to help with my "recovery".

I started to hang out at a Christian "youth house" which was basically a house where teens could go, to get away from family pressures and discuss Christianity. I was older than most of the boys, so I became one of those who talked most and try to make the boys feel welcomed. In spite of this, I felt like a fraud, for I started drinking and dating again. I would tell the kids about Jesus' love for them, and during the nights would drink. Through all this, my one Christian friend would try to council me and keep me on the right track.

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