

Aisha

Aisha Poswal, 47, Mom and Sunday School Teacher, White American

“I became Muslim after living in Saudi Arabia with my family. When I was around 12, 13 years old, I took my *Shahada* (declaration of faith) in 1989. 1995 is when I started wearing hijab. I didn't wear the hijab right away, mainly because at first I thought, well, the whole point of hijab is for people not to look at you. And if you wear hijab in the U.S., everybody's going to be staring at you. So it took me a while to actually become comfortable with it. The reason I started wearing hijab is that I really wanted to be identified as a Muslim. I felt strongly, as part of my faith, that I wanted to do that. That is the number one way to be identified as a Muslim. Right off the bat.

I legally changed my name from Nicole to Aisha [at 18]. When I did that, [my family] asked me, ‘Oh, Do you want us to call you that?’ And I told my parents that no, that's the name that [they] gave me, and I feel that [they] will always know me by that name. And so my family calls me Nicole, they know if they're emailing me or anything that it's going to say Aisha, but they all call me Nicole. And I kept it as my middle name. So it's Aisha Nicole Poswal.

For me, I feel the meaning or the reason why Allah ordered us to wear hijab is more like an equalizer. That wearing hijab makes you judged for you. You have to get to know me and my personality and not my looks. And so I wanted to be judged based on that.

I had always wanted to wear it, but it took me a while to find the courage to be able to. Because, of course, wearing the hijab here is a big decision. And it's difficult to do. So one thing that helped me [in the beginning] is we used to move a lot. We had moved from Lubbock, Texas to San Antonio. So I took that as an opportunity that this was a fresh start. I wouldn't know anybody there, because the weird thing for me is that everybody you know sees you without a hijab, and then the next day you can start wearing it and end up getting all of the questions.

I've never questioned my decision after I've started wearing the hijab. I've never regretted it. It feels weird to think about going outside without my hijab. It's a part of me. I remember I used to go to an all female gym, and I wouldn't wear the hijab while I was at the gym; taking my hijab off there felt like taking my shirt off or something.

[When my daughters, Anjum, 24, and Shabana, 23, first wore the hijab,] I didn't give them any choice. I told them that I wanted them to do it. I felt it was important for them to do it young, and I felt that just because it's an important part of me and my faith that I wanted them to be able to have that. I felt that making that choice when you're younger is easier. In my experience, I used moving to different cities [as an excuse] to start, because it was awkward to start. So I decided to make that choice for them. When I saw that they were both struggling, and were not liking that they were wearing it, I then said, ‘Okay, well, the whole reason that I wanted you to do this is because I wanted this to be a part of your [entire] Muslim identity, but you can be a good Muslim without wearing hijab.’ And that's the main goal for me: I wanted them to be good Muslims. If you can be a good Muslim and not wear hijab, I'll leave the choice to you whether you continue wearing it or not. And so they both decided that they didn't want to.”