

Sana & Elham

Elham Dalaq, 47, Nurse, Palestinian-Jordanian

“I was born in Kuwait but grew up in Jordan. My sister was eight years older and wearing the hijab; she inspired and encouraged me to do it. I did it because of her, and then in Jordan, at a certain age, most girls start wearing the hijab. So for me, it wasn't a hard decision. It made sense.

As a nurse, I feel like all of my coworkers respect me. I have never had any issue with anyone, even my patients see me and know that the hijab is part of my religion and they respect that. If people ask me about it, I don't take it as a negative thing. I know that they're curious and want to know more, and I'm happy to answer; I'm happy to talk about it. I don't have any issue, nor am I ashamed. I'm a proud Muslim.

As hijabis, we understand that the hijab is a part of Islam. We always ask Allah to give us strength [as Muslims]. I struggle a lot. Sometimes I struggle with my faith, but I try to give back, pray and ask Allah to give me strength and to continuously make me better.”

Sana Ayesh, 16, Student, Palestinian-American

“When I was in California, during fourth grade, I became a hijabi, but then I kind of felt pressured, so I took it off. Then I moved to Kansas during sixth grade. I was sitting outside of a classroom with my friends, and we were talking about the hijab. Since it was an Islamic school, we all had to wear the hijab as part of the uniform. At that point, I asked them, ‘Who's a hijabi?’ because I was curious to know if they still continued to wear it even outside of school. They were all saying that they were, and I felt like I wanted to do it, too. I'm going to wear it. So that was my inspiration.

When I had put it on for the first time, I just remembered that I loved the hijab. I love the idea of it. To me, it's beautiful. I always liked putting it on, and I felt more like myself. Whenever I look at myself with the hijab on, I feel more complete. I knew I wanted to wear it, [initially], but it was hard due to pressure. Now, I can't imagine myself going out without my hijab. I get nightmares from thinking that I could accidentally walk out without my hijab. It's a second skin to me.

As Muslim women, the hijab is our identity. When you wear the hijab, people automatically know that you're Muslim, which is a good thing. If I ever go out and order something, and people see that I'm a hijabi, they will warn me and say that a dish has alcohol or pork in it.

It is important that a hijabi chooses to love the hijab, because when you're forced to wear it, you don't have time to fall in love with it. You think of it as a heavy weight on your shoulders. It's like when you tell a baby not to touch a hot stove, they're going to touch it, anyway.”