

## Being a Muslim

By

Yousra Jatt

I'm going to be honest, most people are afraid of me or rather the stereotypes that follow me around. They see the thick and frizzy hair, beautiful yet Middle Eastern eyes, and the brown skin. No, I'm not the Bearded Lady, I'm a Pakistani-Muslim girl who has to deal with the stereotypes, the racism, and the discrimination that is seen in the world's views today. It is an incomprehensible life, from my perspective, but, I want to make it a life that I can share with those around me. I want to take a story of a girl constantly stuck between a rock and a hard place, and create an existence that everyone can understand and learn from.

I work at Winn Dixie, a southern supermarket in a small rural county in Central Florida. Constantly, I put a smile on my face and even as I show my pearly whites and dimples, I can still sense the fear and hatred of those surrounding me: the hatred for Muslims, the fear of Muslims and the "Islamophobia." To some extent, it's absolutely not the fault of the people who show the fear, at this point, it is understandable.

Almost two years ago, my hometown Orlando experienced one of America's worst mass shootings at a gay night club by the name of Pulse. I was just as terrified as anyone else. Not only because it is my hometown, where I have friends and loved ones, but also because it once again lifted a veil and showed me that the world truly wasn't safe for anyone. I prayed that night, hoping that the perpetrator was not a Muslim. He was.

Once again, this event made society question me and made people who had known me for years, question me. I still remember the moment I first watched the news and how all the national monuments displayed the colors of a rainbow to represent the LGBTQ community that was attacked. It was a symbol of their unity and strength in a time where, for me, unity seemed light years away.

I am a 17-year-old Muslim girl from Florida. I practice Islam and will never stop that because it defines who I am and it shapes me as a person. Islam is my armor; the fact that I am a Muslim is my armor.

Islam does not spread violence, but rather, it is the people who are defaming the peaceful religion. Additionally, media plays a huge role in portraying us negatively. They always highlight the pessimism of the religion, and

a lot of times, they do not take into consideration the religious practices and peaceful messages the religious system promotes.

In the religion of Islam, if someone murders a human being, that person committing the crime is not a Muslim. It's as simple as that. But, nowadays, unfortunately, the public does not consider these details. Fear takes over and little intuition or reason are involved in these developed statements.

My goal is to correct the misconception of what a Muslim actually is. I want the world to stop labelling an entire group because of one person. I want to end "Islamophobia" and injustice that I have seen and experienced firsthand. I want to end the fear and create a way for people outside of the Muslim community to see who we really are and I want them to see what we are: people with lost loved ones too.

I am me and I will continue to aim for my goal. I will revolt against the social norm of "Islamophobia" and I will prove that we are human too. I will show that we have loved ones and that we have lives. I will show the people that we are and I will tell our stories; and it will all begin with the next time I give a smile to a customer at Winn Dixie.