

# Eman

## Eman Eltrabolsy, 51, Mom and Sunday School Teacher, Egyptian

“I grew up believing and knowing that the hijab is an important part of my religion. My dad gave me all the information about the hijab, but he never pressured us. He had a lot of information, he used to read a lot and understand different scholars. He was a teacher for us. Even though I knew girls were supposed to wear it since puberty, my parents never forced me. I began to wear the hijab a few years after I came to America, in 1999. At the time, I tried not to look into people’s eyes because I didn’t want to see their reaction just yet. Slowly I began to build my confidence.

[When 9/11 happened], I didn’t take off the hijab because it was a commitment. I decided to [be proactive and] wear head coverings differently, with hats, scarves. I wore the hijab differently a year after 9/11, until I visited my parents in Egypt and started to wear it regularly again because I saw how the people around me were wearing it– I felt confident again. [Even though it was scary at first,] I was lucky to have a nice neighborhood and deal with nice people around me. If anyone ever gave me a dirty look, I began to look back and they would avert their eyes. That was my strategy for a while. It’s interesting but I think because of the media, people began to learn about the good of Islam after 4, 5 years.

After 9/11, I was not only worried about being a minority, but about my own safety. I was brave at the time. I feel like I was brave, being alone for the whole day while my husband was working, and I was alone with our young children. But I felt lucky. I felt like Allah was with me. In the beginning, [when putting it on] you think that it’s a requirement, but later on it becomes a relationship between you and your God. I wanted to pray, fast, and obey Allah. You have to obey as an obligation, but also to create a relationship between you and your lord.

When I started wearing the hijab, I even started hating my hair. But the way I wear the hijab now makes me feel chic and powerful. I can play with colors and express myself. If you want to learn how to dress up, look at the birds, look at the fish and you will learn how to match colors. If you want to match colors, look at anything in nature.

I want people to know that the hijab is the most wonderful thing to happen to women, because it protects women. My body is my body. I have control over what people can see – that’s mine.”