

the Liberator

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COUNCIL
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS IN AUSTIN

about / competitions / academic / political / student life / art & lifestyle / opinion

- LEGISLATION
- EVENT COVERAGE
- PRINT ISSUES
- SPRING 2016 WRITING COMPETITION

ON FAITH

April 22, 2016 · by The Liberator Magazine · in Spring 2016 Writing Competition, Uncategorized.

This piece was selected as the first prize winner of our Nonfiction Writing Competition, Spring 2016.

Written by: **Nooshin Ghanbari**

CATEGORIES

- o Academic
- o Art & Lifestyle
- o Political
- o Staff Writers
 - o Andy Cerecero
 - o Annyston Pennington
 - o Cole F Watson
 - o Cynthia Turner
 - o Dylan Preston
 - o Elizabeth Teare
 - o Frances Molina
 - o JoJo Phillips
 - o Julian Munoz Villarreal

On Faith

A collection of questions people have asked me, and answers I wish I had given.

To Paula.

”

Why are you friends with that Muslim girl?

My first experience with Islamophobia was in the seventh grade. At that point in my life, questions about my religion had never been directed to me personally, but to others around me: my father (“You know you’re going to Hell, right?”), my mother (“Did he force you to convert?”), even my best friend. I remember going to her house after school one day. It was at the far corner of a cul de sac in notoriously rich and white Mansfield, Texas. There was a piano just

PRINT ISSUES


- FALL 2015



~ ~ "The Language Issue" ~ ~

APRIL 2016

M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
« Mar					May »	

- Kristi Kamesch to the right of the doorway, sheet music piled high against the wall.
- Madeleine Kenney But most noticeably, there were crosses of different shape, size, and color everywhere.
- Mubarrat Choudhury The first thing that comes to mind when I think of that day is my friend telling me I could “go ahead and go upstairs,” a pleading glance in her glassy blue eyes. The next? An overheard whisper of *why are you friends with that Muslim girl*, like I was a bad taste in her
- Olivia Mizell
- Samantha Bolf
- Sarah Lynn Neal mother’s old mouth, an eleven year old little demon screaming, *I’m different. I’m a bad influence on your daughter who of course you named Faith.*
- William Moessinger
- Student Life Faith would later apologize profusely, and I would think nothing of it
- Uncategorized because I liked her a lot. But even at eleven, I knew it was an
- Voices of Liberal Arts encounter I would not be telling my parents about—just like I wouldn’t tell them about how a boy in my eighth grade advisory called my dad a camel jockey, or how I later “dated” a boy for less than a week in college before he severed ties with me upon discovering that I wasn’t Christian. No, there were simply some things I knew I would have to keep to myself.
- Event Coverage
- Guest Articles
 - Spring 2016 Writing Competition —
- Opinion
- Print Issues *To Aaron.*
- The Language Issue  *Isn’t Iran scary?*

ARCHIVES

- May 2016 I have only been to Iran once in my life, the summer before the second grade. I don’t remember much about culture or language from the trip, but I’ve retained memories that only a wide-eyed child could: a hot Tehran summer passed by cousins washing my hair;
- April 2016
- March 2016 Father making *bastani sonnati* from rose water, saffron, and pistachios; tiptoeing into the mosque of Imamzadeh Davood; falling sick after eating berries in the Alborz mountains. At the age of six, I experienced Iran as a tourist. An outsider.
- February 2016
- January 2016
- December 2015
- November 2015 Is Iran scary? Yes. It is scary through the eyes of a six year old who cannot speak the language she was named in. The ride is rickety on a camel’s back and the bazaars are packed with towering figures in black and brown—but also in golds and greens and blues so bright, your head spins. Iran is different and new.
- October 2015

Scary or not, I want to go back.

To Eric.

”

*Doesn't working at a church make you
feel guilty?*

I remember everything about the moment when I found out that I had been hired as the alto section leader of an Episcopal church's parish choir in North Austin. As a lover of choral singing and a student who desperately needed a part-time job, I was thrilled. As a non-Christian, I was terrified.

I now know that I shouldn't have been. With every Sunday morning in the music ministry, my fascination with Christianity expands, and my exploring does nothing but reinforce my already held belief that Christianity and Islam are more similar than many may realize. But every once and a while, I get a question from some of the older members in the choir: "Remind me what church you grew up with in Arlington?" I tell each of them the same circular version of the truth: that my mother was Catholic and my father Muslim, so I was raised with both disciplines. I recall fond memories of my mom lulling me to sleep with hymns and stories from the Bible, while also recounting prayers in Arabic and "Sunday school" lessons about the Qur'an. I tell them all of this.

I leave out the bit that my mother ended up converting to Islam, and that my current knowledge of the Bible is limited to allusions in poetry and prose. It isn't that I think they would fire me if I readily advertised the fact that I am not Christian. It isn't even the fact that I am worried of being thought of as a liar, because I have never claimed to be someone that I am not. No matter what I do, however, I cannot help but shake the feeling that I am a fraud. Every year around Holy Week, my choir director asks, "When do you think you will want to get confirmed?"

I answer with "next year" and a smile every time.

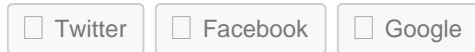
To Christopher.

”

Are you sure you're Muslim?

The dictionary defines “outlier” as something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body—which is, incidentally, exactly how I feel about my faith. On some days, I am more sure than others, but the answer to the posited question is always yes. I may think of myself as non-practicing, but I still feel very Muslim, and I find comfort in knowing that I am not the only one. There are others like me, perhaps a whole generation of outliers, outsiders on the comparative gradient of “other” Muslims. Despite my feeling of not belonging, I am not burdened by questions of certainty. I have practiced my own personal version of Islam for nineteen years, praying once a day instead of five and adhering to a fast that is more similar to Christians during Lent than to my Muslim brothers and sisters during Ramadan. Like my fellow outliers, I do not believe in an inflexible Islam. Instead, I practice my faith with the knowledge that, if others aren't sure that I am Muslim, it doesn't matter—because, in the end, I am.

Share this:

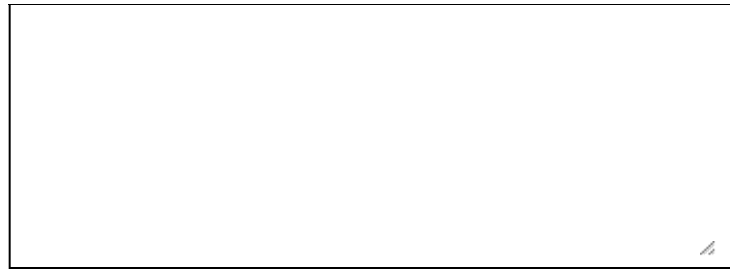


Loading...

[← For a Moment](#)

[Student Economics: The Obstacles
of Divestiture →](#)

Leave a Reply



Email (required) (Address never made public)

Name (required)

Website

Notify me of new comments via email.

Notify me of new posts via email.