

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Years ago, on the old homestead, after taking his Saturday night bath, Daddy walked into the kitchen with gobs of his hair in his hands. The rest of his hair looked like melted rubber bands sliding off his head. He said to Mama, “Georgia, I don’t know what kind of shampoo you bought, but it sure ain’t no count.” Unable to read the label without his glasses, Daddy had accidentally used my Nair hair remover. Gradually his hair grew back, and he survived. That’s the way this book is. You’ll survive it, but it might mess up your hair for a while.

This book is written especially for newly converted Muslims, but it will also appeal to vintage Muslims and anyone interested in learning about Islam from a down-to-earth, American perspective. If you believe that deep ponderings should be left to grumpy scholars with frizzy beards, that loony-tune laughter is not befitting a serious Muslim, and that everything non-Islamic is also anti-Islamic, then you may end up needing a wig. If you are a dogmatic Muslim who jumps up and down whenever a new-fangled perspective is presented, maybe you should take your blood pressure medicine before reading this book. Although this is a serious book, it is often shockingly serious in humorous ways. There are also some tearjerkers that come straight from the heart, and I hope you can feel some of the emotion I felt when I lived those heart-wrenching moments.

“Adventures of a Reluctant Traveler” is my autobiographical sketch, which includes the story of how Islam found me. With that background, I interpret my rural lifestyle through my own understanding of the Universal Qur’an. From my ninety-nine parables emerge conclusions based on my own rustic insights. Please don’t pitch a hissy fit if my perspective doesn’t match traditional views.

In this book, you’ll meet my family. My husband Tom is a loveable creature with a wide grin and a jackhammer laugh. Our son Duston (Dusty) is also a big-grinner and has a laugh that sounds similar to a hot cannonball exploding through a fireworks factory. Our daughter Tana is an off-again, on-again joy-to-terror ride. She can change moods quicker than the contented cat switching her tail under my rocking chair. Our old homestead is in the foothills of beautiful North Carolina. We’ve lived with all kinds of animals, including goats, chickens, birds, fish, dogs, rabbits, rats, and cats. We love the country life because we can read the Scriptures in nature every day. I hope that you can come in closer contact with nature by reading my parables, and I hope that it’s not the kind of nature that you have to scrape off your boots before you walk into the house.

27. THANKFUL FOR AN AWL AND ALL

Who can provide for you if He were to withhold His provision?
But (the unbelievers) obstinately persist
In insolent impiety and hasty aversion.

(Inspired by Surah 67: 21)

How often do you thank God (blessed and exalted is He) for the most mundane things? I even thank Him for toilet paper. My family used corncobs until I was nearly grown.

Each day of mine is either hilarious or tragic. Sometimes it's hilariously tragic or tragically hilarious. This particular day was no different. With half a dozen cats sleeping on top of me, it's always a struggle for me to get out of bed in the morning. I wrestled my way out from under the covers. Munchkin latched onto my nightgown with her claws and her teeth, trying to keep me in bed so we could all snuggle.

I got free and wobbled to the kitchen. The cats began begging for fish food. All the animals here had food oddities. The dog preferred the cats' food, and the rabbits liked the goats' food. Raccoons ate the dog's food, and the goats ate the chickens' food. The chickens liked macaroni and cheese, and the ducks' favorite food was fried chicken.

The fish struggled to suck down some flakes. He had been having a hard time swallowing since he had gotten a flake of food stuck sideways in his throat. That was the first time I ever saw a fish do the shimmy-shimmy shakes!

I grabbed a little grub myself as I loaded a box with tools to take to my sister's house to do some repairs. I put the box into the back seat of a cramped, old clunker so small that the back seat was almost in the front seat. I got into the car and pulled the seatbelt. I felt resistance, so I just yanked till the belt was free. I buckled it, and the belt lay limp across my lap. I picked it up and studied it. It was ripped apart! I looked behind me and saw my hacksaw sticking up out of the box. It was grinning with pieces of seatbelt stuck in its teeth. Some people would have been upset, but I was thankful. I have a car. With a seatbelt! I have a hacksaw. And I have an awl and thread with which to repair the seatbelt. I'm grateful for all those things.

I'm grateful that Tana cared enough to buy me some plastic, scented cherries to hang in the car, but I was allergic to the deodorant on them. Heading down the road, I started sneezing. Each time I sneezed, I inadvertently accelerated, and I sneezed in rapid succession. "Aaachooo!" went I. "Vrrrrmmm!" went the car. "Aaachooo!" "Vrrrrmmm!" "Aaachooo!" "Vrrrrmmm!" I was just grateful there was not a highway patrolman to stop me and question my sporadic driving.

By the time I neared my sister's house, my breakfast of Slim-Fast and M & M's was wearing thin. I stopped at a greasy food joint for a bowl of watered-down chili. Another customer began a conversation with me as she waited for her grease-burger. She was complaining about the bitter wind and clouds.

"I thought it was supposed to be a nice day," she said.

"It *is* a nice day," I insisted. "We aren't having a tsunami or a flood or an earthquake or a tornado. With all the crazy weather around the world, I'm just thankful to wake up and find that my bed is still in my house and that my house is not in the creek."

I finally got to work repairing my sister's floor. My sister Toy reminded me, "When you get my age, you won't feel like crawling around on the floor and up ladders and stuff like that." I was already older than she was when she first started telling me that.

I worked for several hours and then stretched my aching neck and shoulders. "Ohhhh, pus and spit," I softly moaned.

Toy was in her bedroom while I was in the kitchen. Toy, who couldn't hear an avalanche falling on a landmine field, said, "Linda, you sound tired."

I yelled back to her, "How can you hear me moaning when you can't hear a word I say when I'm talking straight at you?"

She said, "What?"

I muttered, "Huh? What did you say? Is somebody talking? What? Are you saying something?"

Toy came out of her bedroom. "Are you talking to me?"

I said, "No, I'm just making fun of you."

She said, "What?"

I came to a stopping point and loaded everything back into the car. I got home just in time to see the crazy raccoons fighting over the last piece of cherry pie somebody had left me. I chased away the raccoons and stared longingly at the miserable remains of what I could only imagine to have been a scrumptious pie. I went into the house and stared out the window at what was left of the pie. That was the first time in my life that somebody, besides Mama, had ever baked me a cherry pie. And I missed it! Smoke puffed from my ears. Suddenly a raccoon ran out of the woods, snatched up the remnant of pie—pan and all—and dashed back into the woods.

I tried to be thankful about that cherry pie. The raccoons were thankful. They were grinning with pieces of cherries stuck in their teeth. I was thankful that somebody loved me enough to bake me a cherry pie, but I wanted to have my pie and eat it too.

Of course, I didn't *need* a cherry pie; I just wanted it. Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings upon him) told a funny story about Job (peace upon him) and how he wanted all the little blessings he could get. "When Prophet Job was taking a bath, golden locusts started falling on him. Job collected them [to

eat] and wrapped them in his clothes [that he had laid aside for his bath]. The Lord asked Job, ‘O Job, haven’t I given you enough stuff that you don’t need locusts?’ Job answered, “Yes, by Your power! Still I cannot forego any of Your blessings.”³⁴

Later that evening, my brother Ron called to ask how I liked the cherry pie he had baked and left for me on the picnic table. I told him what had happened to the pie, and he said, “Well, raccoons gotta eat too.” But, Ron, I feed them plenty of dog food!

When Tom learned of the cherry pie disaster, he came home and baked me a cherry pie himself. Finally, it was I grinning with pieces of cherries stuck in my teeth.

Now that the sun has set,
I sit and rest and think of You.
Make peace sink into my weary body.
Make my legs and arms stop aching.
Make my nose stop sneezing.
Make my head stop thinking.
Grant me sleep in Your arms.

[Dinka evening prayer (Sudan)]

o justice among ourselves.
Bless us, O Allah Almighty,
With thankfulness and appreciation
For Your bounties in the flora and fauna.
Bless us with faith, unity, and discipline
So we may not be among the trespassers.
O Allah, we cannot deny Your favors
Bestowed upon us in mind, body, and soul.
Accept our thanksgiving.
Guide us with Your wisdom, and do not allow us to stray.

[Humeyra Kazmi (Pakistan)]³³