

My Story, My Home

sharing stories and starting conversations



My Story, My Home was a community photography project: American photographer Tim Matsui designed and delivered a two-week photography workshop at the Australian Islamic College resulting in an exhibition, an interactive website (<https://medium.com/my-story-my-home>) and booklet *My Story, My Home*.

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Cover image by: Zainab Hourani



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Introduction

In conceiving *My Story, My Home*, we expected stories revealing both the diversity and the commonality within, between and across the Muslim and wider communities. We expected a glimpse into a world we didn't know. Instead, we found the reality of empowering youth to share and shape their stories.

In our image-saturated world, news and online media can define a group. Millions of images and multiple perspectives are reduced to a dangerous few, leaving us to build stories of unfamiliar people and places from limited narratives.

This is where independent journalists and storytellers come in. We designed the project around 25 Muslim youth who could take the lead, sharing their homes and stories, countering the dominant media narrative.

What quickly came to the fore was both revelatory and pedestrian. They are teenagers before all else: using phones first, often to capture their lives of gaming, snap-chatting, taking selfies. The teens' stories of home revolved around food, football, and friends—rather universal teen themes. They weren't telling us a cultural or religious story, but a teenage story where culture and religion parallel the interests and intrigues of the teen years.

What also surprised us was the need for words to go with their images. Teens when asked 'How was your day?' often don't have much to say. Yet present them with a photo of their own making and stories emerge: a personal decision to wear the hijab, a fear of ignorance and a desire for western freedom, a longing for connection with family, the distance of war made real. Their images were not the story but a portal to their stories. This is power of an image to inspire conversations.

This is the power and the learning from *My Story, My Home*. Let these photographs be a pathway to sharing stories and starting conversations.

Tim Matsui, World Press Photo Winner 2015 for long documentary "The Long Night".
Ryan Ammon, Mica Pereira, and Laura Strentz, World Press Photo Perth and MICA exhibitions.

October 2016



Zainab Hourani

Age 16

Born in Australia.

Mother from Australia, Father from Iraq.

We are family

All of my family members gathered together to celebrate my grandfather's return from Lebanon. His wife and children surprised him with a plane ticket because they agreed that he needed a month long break from taking care of his drug addicted son for the past 22 years. I felt ecstatic that my family was together again with Grandad—father figure and friend. The whole night was filled with laughter and good vibes which I tried to capture in this image.

Group of boys

A group of boys laughing as they make their way to class after pausing from their busy school day to pray at the mosque (masjid). Muslims pray because they believe that they obtain great benefit in doing so. It gives them a chance to reflect on their daily actions—whether good or bad. Whether it be to thank God or to ask for forgiveness. The prayers are said in Arabic, no matter what the person's native language. The Islamic holy book, also known as the Quran, is written in Arabic but can be translated. Muslims are from many different countries and backgrounds from all over the world. Reading the Quran unites us, because we are all recite the same holy words of God, no matter the language.





Amina Ali Seedat

Age 16

Born in Australia.

Mum is from Zambia, Father from Zimbabwe.

My sister and I Joined Navy Cadets together but for different reasons. She joined to learn about the Navy, to meet new people, and was curious to learn.

I was going through a stage in my life where I needed to build self-confidence and come out of my shell. At first, I was fearful of judgment for how people would respond to Muslims joining. My sister and I were the only Muslims at TS PERTH and we were quite anxious about what people would think of us. I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

After attending it a couple of times, I saw what it was all about, how friendly the people were, and how much fun they had amongst themselves. At the unit we are taught to have respect for each other's values and to treat others well.

At the Australian Navy Cadets, we start off by parading at sunset. Afterwards, we continue with our weekly Friday tasks. This includes learning about the Navy, such as different parts of boats and ships, learning how to sail, playing instruments for the parade, participating in fun activities and having a feast, also known as "stand easy" in Navy jargon.

Just like Navy sailors who wear their uniform to symbolize who they are, Muslims do so too. In Islam, Muslim women wear a hijab or a covering as a form of identification.



Amina Ali Seedat



My sister at the pool

In Islam, Muslim women wear a hijab or a covering as a form of identification. Because it is so normal for me to be covered, wearing a burqini to the beach feels like wearing a normal hijab. Just like any other journey, every Muslim goes through their own journey in discovering the Hijab.

I started wearing the hijab when I was 14 years old. It was a choice I made by myself because I felt like I was ready to become closer to my religion.

Being in the Navy goes well with my identity as a Muslim.

Beyza Erdogan

Age 15

Born in Turkey





Sharmeen Rashid

Age 15

Born in Pakistan

My sister

My sister's name is Narmeen, and she's three years old. She means everything to me. We love to go out and play, go biking, and we also love to go on hikes. Both of us love to drive our parents and our other sister crazy. It's what we are good at.

She loves to be on YouTube and watch Peppa Pig. She loves food, especially pizza and cake. She is a very fast learner. She has a lot of arguments with me over the stupidest stuff, which drives me nuts, but every time she wants something or has done something wrong, the only person she comes to is me. Even if it's in the middle of the night. She wants me to do everything for her from simple stuff like getting a tissue to getting her the food she eats. She loves being with me and it annoys her if I don't spend enough time with her. She's very special to me, I love her.

My Mum

Every time I need to be alone from the world and have peace I think about an amazing place where it's quiet, there's a lot of greenery, and the birds are singing. This area is like that. There are a lot of plants, trees, flowers and the birds flying. The wind blows, but it's not that strong. It's a nice little breeze that everyone likes.

It reminds me of my childhood and my mum because my mum and I used to go out hiking or spend time in our garden playing or having a nice cup of tea. I used to love nature, but after her death I can't do those things because she isn't there with me. I can't do it alone.

So, whenever I miss my mum I go to that place because it reminds me of her. It feels like she's there with me and all the memories flashback in front of my eyes.





Shimma Hamed

Age 14

Born in Australian. Parents from Eritrea and Sudan.

To wear, or not to wear

For many Muslim girls, it is normal to wear a head scarf as it is a sign of identification and a reflection of modesty and humbleness. Depending on the family, the age at which girls start wearing the hijab is different. Some girls start wearing at ages 7 or 8 just because their mum wears it. Other girls start wearing it when they reach puberty. This is most common. Others will wear it at a later age, if they decide to ever wear it all. The journey to wearing a hijab is different for every girl.

In Islam, our holy book the Quran says "O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, so that they may be recognized and covered. Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful" (Quran 33:59). This verse is a command from God to be modest in our dress and is interpreted differently depending on the person.

For me, I started wearing the hijab at about 8 or 9. At 11 I rebelled, saying I didn't want to wear it anymore because none of my friends wore it. Most of my friends, at the time, were from Christian and Atheist backgrounds. As I matured and learned the true reason for wearing it, I began to wear it again. I was 13. I came to accept that God commands that women nurture their modesty; it is a necessary part of our religion.

In the Muslim community, there are some people who judge girls who don't wear the headscarf. Not only is this a kick to someone's self-esteem, but it also has a negative effect within the community. These people who judge others believe that they are better in their religion and life, even though in Islam, and in general, it is not good to be judgmental or arrogant. Only God can judge you. Only he knows what's in your heart.

Shimma Hamed

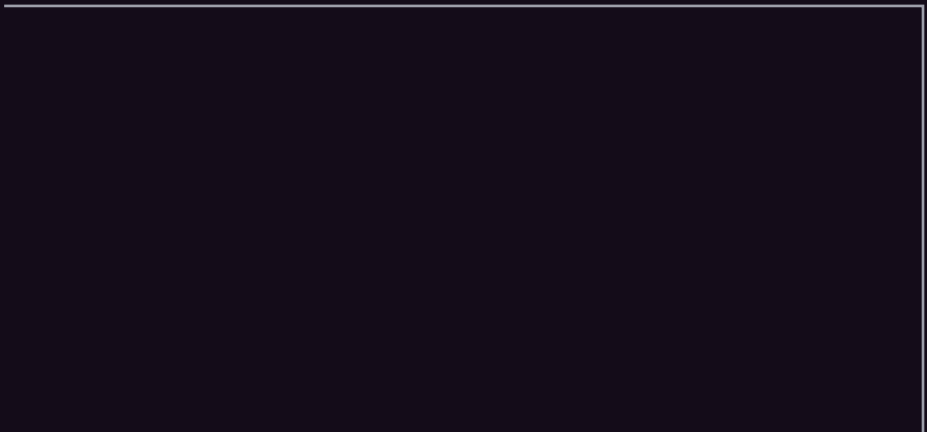
Beyond the judgment within the Muslim community, the head scarf is also judged by some as oppressive. The definition of the word oppression is to have prolonged cruelty against you or unjust treatment from people of authority. In the eyes of many people, Muslim women are oppressed because of the men in their lives, such as their fathers and brothers who may force them to wear scarf or even to be Muslim.

In some cases this is true, as many people interpret the commands of Islam in an extreme way. However, in general, most Muslim families who want their daughters to wear the head scarf and dress modestly simply tell them the reason they should do so: The reason is to please God.

Just like other families, parents know what is good for children. In a non-Islamic family, the parents could tell their daughter to dress modestly and not wear extremely revealing clothes or clothes that don't fit the occasion. Parents know what is right as they have more experience in life.

If you look into things too hard, you start seeing things aren't really there. This happens when others look at certain aspects of Islam, such as the hijab. I wear a scarf because I choose to, and because I know and believe it is what God wants me to do. Some Muslims might not wear a scarf, not because they are purposefully trying to disobey God, but because they haven't gotten there yet. This happens because of many reasons, such as friends or family.

Everyone's life is their own journey that they should go through happily doing what they believe is right and following their heart.



Mahdi Alshemary

Age 15

Born in Australia, Parents from Iraq

My Australia

I took this image after interviewing Jess to show the diversity of the many nationalities that bask under the Australian sun and how they live in harmony amongst one another. Despite me introducing myself as a Muslim, she disregarded all the stereotypes of Muslims that she may have been exposed to and happily spoke with me. I asked her "What makes a place home to you?" and she replied that home is "where there is safety, friendship and family bonds, and a sense of belonging." I think these are things that everyone should be entitled to and things that many receive when in Australia.

This is a photograph I took of four flags under the skies of Perth. These four flags show that Australia's indigenous people's flag is acknowledged as a flag of Australia just like all the other flags. The Australian community is a place where diversity and difference is accepted with open arms.





Maysoun Tarawneh

Age 16

Born in Jordan

The Distant War

My mom has a photo of my uncle with me and my brother. We look young. This was before the war, when he visited us in Australia.

Before my family came, we lived in a four-story house in Syria. My extended family of 10 lived in the house.

My father was born in Jordan. My mother is Syrian, and as a family we have lived in Australia for 12 years.

My parents and I left Syria when I was three. We haven't visited Syria due to the war. The last time I saw my cousins and grandparents was two years ago in Jordan. One uncle and three cousins returned to Syria to fight against the government. Some were killed by bombs; some were shot. I still have more family in Syria who are unable to leave.

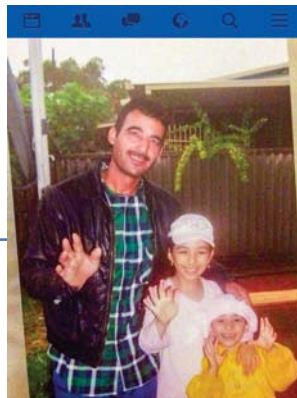
In Jordan, my family says they're only living to live. They are unable to enjoy life, for they have no freedom. They are refugees.

Two years ago, when was 14, we visited Jordan. I hadn't seen these family members since I was three. Most of the family greeted us at the airport, coming by bus. Some travelled from Karak to the capital city in Amman, a two hour drive.

My Syrian cousins living in Jordan receive 10 Australian dollars per week from their jobs. It's not enough. My parents send them around \$300 dollars whenever they can, to help them survive. They only want the best for me and my siblings, helping us to grow up and be successful. They don't want us to rely on others to make a living.

My father loves experimenting with cooking, going to new places and giving us new experiences. It makes me feel connected, loved, and inspires me to try new things My mother loves to joke, just like my dad, but she is a more serious person who prefers consistency in life. And in cooking. They balance each other.

One of the new places we went was strawberry picking on the 15th of October. It helped my mum forget about her brother and nephews in Syria, the ones who were killed.





Aminah Cicak

Age 15

Born in Bosnia



My snapchat life

I snapchat everything and anything that interests me. Whether it's a family trip somewhere or just a visit to grandmas, if I've got myself done up for some reason or just mucking around with my siblings, I love to snapchat everything during the moment. I've got my little sister obsessed with the app, particularly for the filters. Snapchat allows me to communicate with my friends and family daily, as well as relatives and cousins overseas. Using snapchat you can meet all types of people and make friends and personally I love to make new friends.

Family and friends

To me family is important, we have our ups and downs but we'll never grow apart. We'll stick by each other and forever have each others' backs. Our family is a large one with 4 girls and 3 boys, so we never get bored. I have chosen one friend who is like family to me. My best friend has been there with everything that has happened in my life. I wouldn't be able to survive without my family and my friend.





Mirza Bindahneem

Age 15

Born in Australia. Parents from Burma



I made this picture in the heart of Fremantle. It is of a poster showing people who came to Australia but aren't considered Australian. The poster was made to remind us that Australia is a multicultural society.

A seagull stands on top of a memorial for the people who have migrated to Australia. This is significant to me as my parents are also immigrants to Australia.

This is Friday prayer (Jumua) where Muslims congregate to pray to their God. Muslims unite like this not only on Fridays but every day.



Benaldy Merdi

Age 15

Born in Indonesia

I lived in Indonesia for the first few years of my life, then I moved to Perth. I'm a part of a family of 6, with my extended family living in various places around the world. I have an interest in various languages and want to learn as many as possible. Currently, I am learning Japanese and I plan to learn Farsi as well. I believe that family and friends are what makes a place my home.

My "mates" and I frequently travel on public transport on our travel to school. Some of them, I've known for life, while others I have only met during my high school life. The relationships between me and each of them vary. We have our ups and downs and although we're not blood related, we all enjoy each other's company and treasure our precious memories. Second from the right is "Amin", who is from a Malaysian background and a person I've known dearly from the early years of my life. He is overly polite and kind, always saying "sorry" even when it's unnecessary but that's just what makes him who he is. The addition of friends in my life is what makes me call Perth, and the larger Australian community, my home.

My daily commute

Beside me is someone I share many memories with. Ever since I was 4 years old, he has been a close friend to me. His name is "Ray Ali" and I am pleased to have met him. I first interacted with him in my first year of schooling, in kindergarten, and our friendship has only become stronger since then. Whether it was asking for advice on selecting my subjects, or asking for the plans of the weekend, it all had a calm and natural feel to it. I hope that I will know him for life and make much more memories with him to complete "my story".





Khanssa Guma Abdalla

Age 15

Born in Egypt, most recently from Sudan



You know how this goes. Just when you think you are done cleaning your room, your siblings come and ruin the hard work you put in and make it all a mess.

When this happens to me, I try to make my sisters clean the room again, but as you can see, these pin heads didn't and instead, they decided that it would be fun to play on my bed. So my advice is that when you're done cleaning your room make sure that you lock the door.



Serdar Kalkanci

My main hobby is gaming, along with drawing and martial arts. Gaming and drawing are my main solutions to stress.

The things that cause stress for me are family issues, my headache problem (where I have had a headache almost every day for two years), and sometimes school (when I have to hand in work but I leave it to last second due to procrastination).

Friends are an important part of my life.

Most of my friends have similar interests

to me, like gaming. Benaldy and Muhadib are friends I can game with. Mahdi also likes drawing.

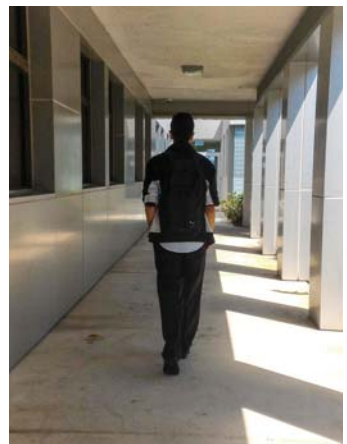
I was up late at 1am playing games and drawing anime characters, which is when I took a few of my pictures. I was up so late because I spent the whole day helping my sister move to her new house. She is a single mother with two children.

She needed the help because she broke her leg while we were playing paintball two weeks ago. She slipped in the first game.

When we were younger, my sister and I spent a lot of time together. Often we would go to the Riverside park. Sometimes we would just drive around Perth. I've picked up a lot of her taste in music and some of her hobbies.

My siblings and I are pretty similar. I have two older brothers, one is 28 years old and the other is 36. We all like gaming, but I mostly do it with my 28 year old brother. We all like drawing and are decent at it. They like drawing people, flowers and other more realistic things while I like drawing anime characters.

Now that we're older we don't really see each other anymore. My sister spends time with her children, my 28 year-old brother is working full time in Malaysia, and rarely get to see my oldest brother; maybe only once every two months.





Muhadib Fauzi Hanafi

Age 15

Born in Jakarta, Indonesia



It was 9:00PM on Monday and I decided to sort catalogues. The catalogues are then placed in a small trolley to take out and deliver the next day. I do it with my dad after he comes home from work at 5:00PM.

While delivering the catalogues, I usually listen to my favourite songs. They are from the 80's. When I finish delivering and arrive back at home, I confirm the delivery on the website and payment is sent into my sister's credit card. We share it 50-50. This is my only source of income for purchasing the things I want, like games, computer parts, etc.

I started doing delivery early this year. At first, I only received a small number of brochures which I could deliver using my bike. But few months later, the company that I work for started sending more and more catalogues. I could not deliver that many using my bike. It was unfortunate but it does not matter because more catalogues = more money! As of right now, delivering catalogues has become mundane and I feel like quitting the job, but it is my only source of income.

My sister usually sorts out the catalogues, but I sometime help her, if she's really busy with uni life. When it comes to delivering the catalogues, it's my and my dad's duty.

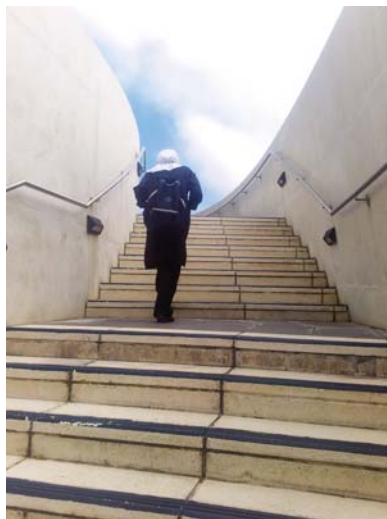


Maha Ahmed

One night my mum invited our family over for a family BBQ. After dinner my brother, sister, two cousins and I were sitting around the kitchen bench and talking and laughing. My sister took out some Persian fairy floss that was given to us by our aunty, and gave it to our cousins to try. One of my cousins tried to take a small piece but instead pulled out a long string of fairy floss. He tried to put the whole string in his mouth but couldn't, so he got fairy floss everywhere.

I don't really know how to bake but I can make cakes and brownies from packet mix boxes. It's pretty simple to follow step by step instructions given on the back of the box, but even then, I still find that I have to ask for help from my mum or sister simply because I can't tell how much oil or butter to put into the mix. My sister is a very good baker because she can make all these complicated desserts like cheesecakes, pies, meringues and sometimes even traditional ones like barfi. Although I would never admit it to her face, and quite frequently accuse her of poisoning us, I do look forward to when she heads towards the kitchen to bake.

On the weekends when my brother is at home we sometimes like to play PS3 and PS4 games together. We play games like Mortal Kombat, Injustice, Fifa15 and Call of Duty. When we play Call of Duty, we play on the same team and we work together to win. It's not like I oppose to playing on opposite teams, but I much prefer it to playing on the same team as my brother. When I play by myself on the game's story mode, my brother always helps me out and tells me what to do whenever I'm stuck. Even though he can be annoying at times, I think we make a pretty good team.





Hams Almohammed

Age 15

Born in Saudi Arabia



I was born in a country that left me ignorant. I was naive of what was happening in other countries or in western societies. I was born in Saudi Arabia, told it is the best, and believed it until I moved to Australia at the age of eleven. I could not speak a single word of English, but when I saw the trees and flowers on the streets and in front of people's homes in Australia, I started doubting what I had been told. This world was different.



Zuhairi Zakaraya



Waiting for the bus everyday can sometimes get a bit tiring, but one thing that doesn't feel tiring is the time I spend with my friends at the bus stop. I feel transportation is one of the key components in our society and I want to express what public transportation feels like to others who might take other forms of transportation.



One of the most fundamental parts of the house is the kitchen. This is my sister baking a cake for her friend's birthday. She is checking the box for the ingredients. I wanted to capture the moment, so in 10 years I can look back at this image and be reminded of this moment with my sister.

Nafisa Abrdirahman



The Project

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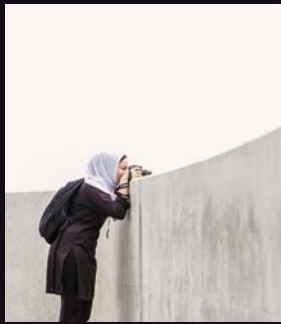


Photo: Sharmeen Rashid



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