Can you drive? Do you have to cover your hair? Is it safe? When are you moving ‘home’?

As an American woman living in the Middle East for over a decade, I have fielded these and similar questions repeatedly. Both my husband and I work for Texas A&M University at Qatar (did you know A&M has a campus there?) and have spent a dozen years overseas raising a family, meeting the most amazing people and experiencing an entirely unique way of life that is not as different as most people assume.
America Made Me Black

I grew up overseas in Okinawa, Japan for 14 years. I had no concept of race and was never treated differently for the color of my skin or my features. When I moved to America that all changed; I have routinely been called the N word, made fun of for my behaviors and features, and have felt fear on multiple occasions because of my race. This is my story of how America made me black.
5/21 From Yuma

I was born in Yuma on May 21, I am a Gemini; I was a decent son who had a great mom. I ranched for a local family until I joined the Army. My experiences include being stationed in Germany when the Berlin Wall – isolating the communist east from the western world – was torn down. In 1991, I deployed to Operations Desert Storm and Provide Comfort as a helicopter door-gunner, transporting aid to Iraq’s Kurdish people. Soon after returning, I again deployed to assist the LAPD during the riots, which followed the televised police beating of Rodney King. I am a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, where my team’s purpose was to seek out Saddam Hussein’s hidden arsenal of weapons capable of mass destruction. My leadership journey included holding every enlisted leadership position in an Army company. I was an advisor for US Army Reserve units in Mississippi; while living there, I helped a black Soldier survive racism in Forrest County, MS. I served in the Republic of Korea, where I led 2nd Infantry Division HQs troops through several North Korean missile threat alerts, and through their only successful test-detonation of an atomic bomb. For my Middle East war-service, I received the Bronze Service Star. I retired as a First Sergeant after 20 years then attended Texas A&M University where I graduated with a Masters in Agricultural Development. I am a student at Concord School of Law and work for The Texas A&M University System. I have been married for 28 years to a lassie from Scotland, we have two daughters.
I was brought up in a Christian (Methodist) home. As a child, I drank freely of the kool-aid. As I grew up, I began to look at the world around me. Is religion necessary to be a Good Person? Is religion’s answer to The Big Questions better than science’s “I don’t know”? Is “Because God says so” a good enough answer? I found that, for me, it is not, so I became an atheist.

Why do I say “in a Christian Nation? The current political climate in the US and in Texas is for less, not more, tolerance of non-Christians. Most Christians rightly disown the overt hate crimes perpetrated in the name of Christ, but microaggressions against non-Christians are everywhere. Every day, as I drive by half a dozen churches on my way to work, they cry their Message from their signs, but what they tell me is, “You’re free to be who you want, just keep it to yourself.”
My family, especially my mother’s side, has always had something of a connection to the departed. I used to hope that this “spookiness” would pass me by. Though my adult life has been all about science - concrete, physical things that can be defined and measured, what I’ve experienced has convinced me that our loved ones continue to cherish, watch over, and even gently tease us long after their earthly presence comes to a close.
This is the story of mental struggle between gender identity and societal views of what gender should be. Fear of being vulnerable to those you love and possibly losing them. The hardships left for a story that refuses to end, and how self love and self-creation is used to carry on.
The first in her entire family, this book came to the U.S. alone for college and stayed for 12 years. She did not turn into an American, nor did she remain a person of her own culture. On top of a million things she could tell about why it is amazing to be an international student in an American university, this book also struggled over another million things due to her experience living two lives at once. While reading this book, you might ask yourself: how do you live your life to the fullest, in an unpredictable amount of time?
Self-destruction or Self Care

How much is too much? When I realize that my so called “self-care” was a conflict of interest. The facade I built crumpled around me. I could run away from this one. And who was going to show up for me?
After High school I entered the seminary to begin my journey toward the Catholic priesthood, however after 14 months I left. I experienced the most interior freedom and happiness that I ever had the time I was there. This confused many people and myself because I had the promises of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, while spending most of the day in silence and being cut off from the outside world... humanly speaking I was living in hell, but it was quite the opposite.
My story begins with a dual childhood: one home of love and the other, abuse. The echo of trauma still resonates with me every day, mentally and physically. Still, I wake up and do my best, whatever “my best” might mean that day. My childhood shaped who I am, but I also defy it every day. From high school dropout to honors psychology student, my story is one of both heartache and hope.
In the spring of 2017, I quit my job, sold or gave away many of my belongings, and started a 6-month walk in the woods with a 25-pound backpack and almost no backpacking experience. Reactions from family, friends, and co-workers about my decision ranged from “I'm so jealous,” to “You’re so brave” and “What about bears?” I did see 13 bears, but what I battled the most was my own self-doubt and self-confidence.
When I Sued the Colombian Mafia and Other Stories

I have lived and worked in over 25 countries and have had many interesting experiences that have enriched my life. These experiences, which include practicing law in Colombia, have helped shape my appreciation of diversity, cultures and people different from me.
Lesbians, Trailers, and Boots: Oh My!

Talk about a classic case of looks can be deceiving! Learn how this small-town girl – raised in a trailer park in Appalachia by a lesbian mom battling substance abuse – found her yellow brick road in the big city. With the deck stacked against her, learn how she overcame the odds and found her purpose. She developed fortitude through sports, learned humility through friendships, and found forgiveness in love. She became the first in her family to earn a high school diploma, went on to earn a doctoral degree, and now spends her time advocating for the world’s most vulnerable – children.
More Than the Sum of My Parts

You could easily look at my demographics (Christian, white male, military veteran, career police officer) and think that you know who I am and what my values are. The reality is that my faith, my family relationships, and my life experiences have taken me down some surprising turns and twists. We may have more in common than you would think!
On December 7th, 2014 I sat crying on my bathroom floor, a suicide note in one hand, praying that I could be the daughter my parents wanted me to be. Through unsupportive communities, unaccepting parents and mountains of adversity I now live my truth as fully as I can. This is a story of surviving, healing, and self-acceptance.
I was born and raised in China, but moved to the United States twenty years ago. Living here has been a great experience, and I would like to share my journey with you, as well as my stories of connecting with the power within and the art of self-healing.
The Choice is Yours
I invite you to step forward and choose your own adventure. Learn how healing begins and dysfunctional cycles end; when choice, connection and taking ownership paves the way. Hear stories about what happens when we begin to understand everyone is naturally creative, resourceful and whole. Judgment, control and “the shoulds” can seem like the answers but they can be misleading for us and for others.

I’ve chosen
• opportunities for true justice; for the DOJ and those affected by the “system”
• ending unhealthy patterns of relationships, patterns and addiction
• bringing beauty, love and dignity to disability and death
• that my body is my own to decide what is done to it and with it and with whom

These are my choices. Do you dare to find out why?
We are all in this great dance together so let’s see what happens when we see what’s behind that cover and choose sages from the pages.
From Bull Hauling to Building Codes: What’s a Texas Girl to Do?

This is the story of how a female can be successful in typically male dominated worlds in Texas. One of my first jobs out of school was the finance manager in the Amarillo Kenworth dealership. While working there I met and dated a “bull hauler”, a truck driver who hauled cattle. Date night often consisted of hauling a load of cattle somewhere.

A few years later, I traded my cowboy hat for a hard hat and became this State’s first female building inspector. Currently I work at the Energy Systems Laboratory, TEES, Texas A & M, where one of my duties is training Building Officials/Inspectors, primarily in the areas of energy efficiency and green building. I also serve on the International Code Council Board of Directors. A non-profit corporation, which develops model codes and standards used worldwide to construct safe, sustainable, affordable, and resilient structures. The transition from one to the other, including the highs and lows makes for some interesting reading.
I see my life as a series of short stories tied together by reoccurring themes. I was never one for a traditional career and life but ironically traditions have been consistent underlying themes in each of my life’s chapters. From short order cook to archaeologist to soccer mom to rare book specialist, I explore the various obstacles I encountered and how I went around them.
What Living Alone Taught Me!

You never get to know your strengths fully until you are tested, proved true for me when I first left home in Pakistan to move to Tokyo, with the fear of the impending future; totally predictable at that time. Turned out that the fear of failure had made me much more stronger than the rest!
This is just one of the questions I hear all the time. Another is “really?” followed up by, “well, where are your parents from?” Growing up biracial means that there are a lot of questions, but at least I have two sets of answers.
Being born biracial in America in the 80's should have been a progressive movement but in reality nothing much had changed. The way society was set up I was doomed to be a traded commodity in the foster care system. I grew to be a warrior a defender of freedom. Take a journey to a world that is kept quiet and close to the vest a world where those who are not familiar are not allowed.
I am a TAMU Police Officer

I graduated with a masters degree from Bush School in International Affairs. I became a Police Officer in 2017. I have attended many different trainings and hold various specialty titles with the police and the department.
Losing Control of My Own Body

The human body is amazing and can do so many things, unless you can’t control it. At the age of 14, I lost the ability to control my own body to itself. Having an autoimmune disease means that my body is attacking itself from within and I can’t do anything to stop it. I can only accept it and try to move on.
The twists and turns of life only make navigating easier. After 6 years as a Marine Officer (including two tours in Iraq), I joined a fortune 50 oil company only to semi-retire to be a stay at home dad. Join me as I recount stories from the past, lessons I have learned, and how experience has shaped my perception.
Three Generations of Refugees

They say “People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them”. Stories of a land described by the sound of the nye played by farmers, the bedouin womens’ anklets as they carried olives in a harvest, the figs lying by the ground under the beating sun, the old fellah with kuffiyeh swathing his head, the arguments of men playing backgammon over bubbling hookahs and some halawa and coffee. My beloved grandmother sat across me and explained what had happened the day the were forced to leave, what the color of her shoes were as she fled, the weight of the key of her home in her pocket felt, and all the broken dreams she had left behind.

My father raised in camps, dreaming of a home he has never laid eyes upon. Two generations later, I am crouched in the van hidden by my mothers legs, holding onions to my nose as tear gas suffocates us, crying and praying we make it out alive in a moment that seemed to have no end. Here I am struggling for life with the thought of nothing but my grandmother’s glistening eyes as she handed me the key to the place I call home but will never see.
Stop Trying To Convert Me!

There are lots of things to be insecure about when coming to college - Will I end up switching majors? What if I fail my tests? Do I think people will find me attractive? How do I make friends? How about my family back home? Add on attending a conservative university amidst the 2016 Presidential Elections Season and a hate crime occurring at the local mosque. This Muslim girl had some serious adjusting to do.....
I've traveled quite a bit throughout my life, both voluntarily and involuntarily. There's been times I've been so grateful to explore, and others when I resented having to restart. I learned that the world offered a lot to love, but also presented a lot to be lost.