I am an American We are One Nation

HEART-SHAPED GLASSES SHOW LOVE

Tara Ijai gets suspicious looks but chooses to see things in a positive light

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Each week, this series will introduce you to an exceptional American who is making a difference to unite, rather than divide, our communities. To read more about the American profiled here and more average Americans doing exceptional things, visit onenation.usatoday.com.

Tara Ijai was 28 when she converted to Islam and chose to wear a hijab, a head covering worn by Muslim women.

Two months later, on Sept. 11, 2001, her faith made her a target.

Ijai's father called her in Arizona andasked her not to wear her hijab. He was afraid someone might hurt her.

But Ijai told him, "I chose this. I believe in this."

Fourteen years later, she walked into a restaurant in Los Angeles. She was there with her mother and sister for a shopping weekend. A television was tuned to the news, about the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California.

Ijai, wearing her hijab, could feel people looking at her.

"Are they afraid of me?" she thought.

Later, Ijai called her brother, Brad Boulrice, in Texas.

When they hung up, Ijai's phone buzzed.Boulrice had sent her a picture of a guinea pig wearing heart-shaped glasses, with a caption: "I can't see all the haters with my love glasses on."

Ijai bought herself a pair of heart-shaped sunglasses.

When people complimented her glasses, she explained them: "These are my love glasses. I choose to see the world with love." She bought more and gave them away, ordered more and sold some so she could buy still more.

She called her Facebook page and website "Love Glasses Revolution." She sells heart-shaped glasses and donates a portion of the proceeds to nonprofit groups.

Last Halloween, Ijai was in the parking lot of a grocery store in Scottsdale when a car slowed down. A man leaned out of the open window.

"Hey!" he yelled at her. "Nice costume." When she didn't respond, he pulled closer and yelled again. "Hey, nice costume!"

Ijai looked at him through her heart-shaped glasses.

“Hey, thanks!” she said, and then held up one hand in a peace sign.

Because she can’t see the haters with her love glasses on.

Tara Ijai is a Muslim woman who started wearing heart-shaped glasses as a way of reminding herself to see the love.

DAVID KADLUBOWSKI/USA TODAY NETWORK/PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

Tara Ijai

Location: Phoenix **Age:** 43 **Profession:** Founder, Love Glasses Revolution; mother of two **Mission:** To encourage people to see the world with love **More info:** www.loveglassesrevolution.com

Q&A WITH TARA IJAI

What does it mean to you to be an American?

“It’s what makes me me. It’s what makes it OK to be me. You can be you. I can be me. We can all be American.”

What moment touched and motivated you to launch this effort?

She pushed on her first pair of heart-shaped glasses. “I realized I had a choice. I had a choice how I wanted to show up in the world. And I had a choice of how I wanted to see the world. I would see the world with love.” After that, it wasn’t one single moment but countless interactions with people after she began wearing her heart-shaped glasses that prompted her to launch Love Glasses Revolution. People wanted to do something. Ijai has reveled in the stories and pictures people who bought glasses send to her. They sign up to be love advocates and advocate for equality. “We decided love is just bigger,” Ijai said.

What gives you hope?

How many people ask, “How can I see things differently? How can I get involved?” How many people are wearing love glasses? “All of a sudden people were in Ireland wearing love glasses, in Australia, Canada, all over. We have a team of doctors in Colorado who were wearing love glasses after a woman’s hip surgery.” People of all races, of all religions. And how when she shows up at marches and demonstrations

with a 12-foot banner that says, “Love for all,” people flock to it and push them to the front of the group. At an immigration march in Tempe, instead of “Down with Trump,” they chanted, “Love for all.” “That’s the thing that makes me so excited, that we can actually change the message,” Ijai said. “We can make a difference.”

What do you hope to accomplish through your efforts?

She hopes people will focus on what makes us the same instead of our differences. So she will keep showing up, wearing her hijab. “I know it changes the narrative. They want me to be scary. They want me to be foreign. They want me to be different,” she said. “I’m just going to keep showing up in love.”

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