

Words of Women

2007 Essay of the Year: 2nd Place

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The Most Influential Woman In My Life: Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

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Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, one of the most influential women in history, lived over 1,400 years ago. Her story shatters present day and historical stereotypes of woman's role in society while affirming the attributes of noble and altruistic women everywhere.

Not much is known prior to her fortieth year. We do know that she was a business woman, twice married and twice widowed. She successfully continued her late husband's business in the male-dominated world of trade.

Khadijah refused the many nobles and notables who offered marriage. An upright and honest young employee, named Muhammad, however, caught her attention. Breaking all customs of the day, she proposed marriage. She was fifteen years his senior.

So began a remarkable love story. The business grew as did their family. She bore Muhammad six children; quite remarkable for a woman well past forty. In a polygamous society, they enjoyed a loving and faithful monogamous relationship. They lived a quiet and satisfied life, surrounded by their children. Both were renowned for their charity and kindness.

In later years, she supported her husband's meditative retreats in a nearby mountain cave. He returned one night from his reflections in a great state of agitation. She listened in astonishment as he related a story that is now so well-known to Muslims around the world.

Khadijah immediately accepted the fantastic story Muhammad told her of an angel that appeared to him announcing his Prophethood. The wisdom of years and knowledge of her husband's character left no doubt as to its truthfulness.

Khadijah stood in solidarity with him and became the first Muslim, announcing her acceptance of the message of Islam that Muhammad proclaimed. Their peaceful lives would be forever altered. Harassment and terror awaited those who swore allegiance to monotheism. The idol-worshipping clans of Arabia did everything in their power to wipe out this new and dangerous idea.

Khadijah was a constant source of help and comfort to Muhammad in the difficulties they faced. All of her wealth was spent in spreading the message, sheltering and assisting all those who had embraced Islam.

After years of persecution the Muslims were turned out of their homes and sent into exile in the harsh desert climate. For three years the small Muslim community lived a life of hardship and deprivation, suffering from hunger and exposure. For Khadijah, now sixty-five, the boycott left its mark. In the following year, known by Muhammad as the 'Year of Sorrow', Khadijah died.

Muhammad's honor and service to the memory of Khadijah are legendary. In his words, "She believed in me when no one else did; she accepted Islam when people rejected it; and she helped and comforted me when there was no one else to lend a helping hand."

In Islamic traditions, Khadijah, along with Mary the Mother of Jesus, is counted among the most righteous of all women in history. Her story dispels stereotypes not only of Muslim women, but of women everywhere and serves as an inspiration to us all.

Essays submitted were limited to 500 words.