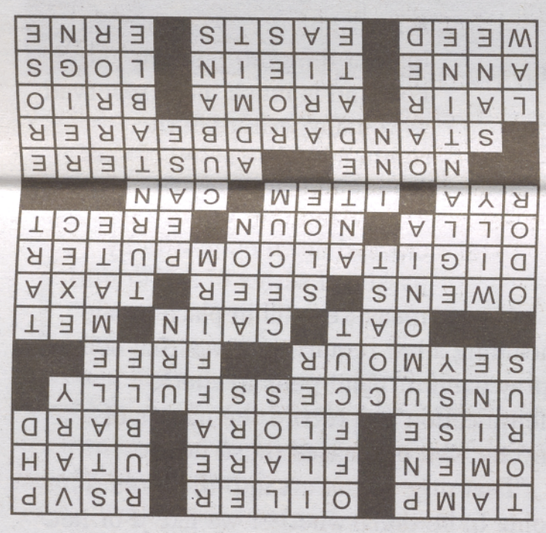
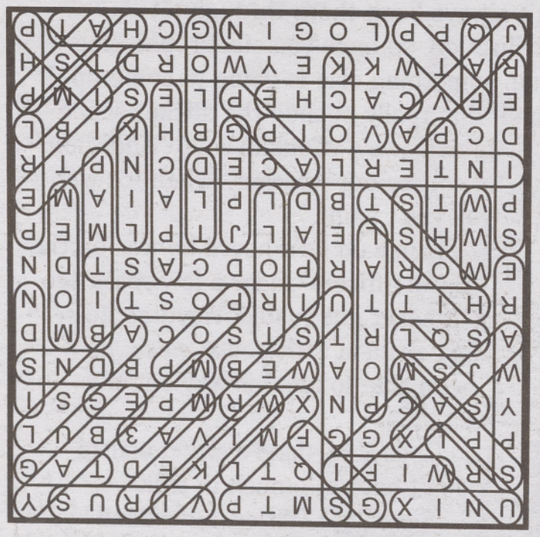
No Longer Homeless

by Maddy Brown-Clark

A time ago I had no home
I slept in cardboard castles
I roamed the street
For something to eat
And I was often hassled
On lonely nights
I slept alone with no way
To keep warm
And after dark in Lilac Park
I slept on a bed of grass
There were clouds in my head
And voices too
I didn't know what to do
But I finally got some help
And I'm no longer homeless
I didn't lose hope
And even though I'm low income
It's so much better
Than the street
In my shared housing safe,
Clean kingdom.

Answers to Page 15 Puzzles





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VENDOR PROFILE

Zaina

BY LEONORA KO
STAFF WRITER

Zaina is only 19 years old, but she already has a bucket list "to go scuba diving on a coral reef and to learn programming."

She also likes art and keeps original drawings and writings in Ninja Turtle notebooks in her backpack. One notebook was the source for poems she read at a recent Street Roots vendor poetry slam.

Another notebook holds clothing designs for long-sleeved tops and pants. Perusing her notebook, Zaina explained her designs: "I had to put bubbles on a shirt. I just had to. It's cute." She points out some pajamas with stars, a shirt with marine life and another with fruit patterns. "That's a smiley face. A smiley face made out of fruit."

She designed the clothing with her religion, Islam, in mind.

"You're only allowed to show your hands and your face," she said, "which is really hard in the summer! Wherever you're shopping for clothes, it can sometimes be difficult because a lot of girls want to wear short shorts and tank tops.

"There are so many times when it's tempting to want to put on a T-shirt. Or go down to one of the water fountains and try and get this wet," she said, pointing to the hijab on her head.

But staying true to her religion is important to Zaina, who was born and raised Muslim.

"Of course, that's something I still pursue. I'm not going to let anybody break that. I mean, I can be pretty stubborn sometimes. I'll admit it."

Zaina said she lived a sheltered life, with private schools and people around her who provided a buffer to the outside world. But in late July, she left home in the middle of the night with what she could carry on her back.

"I should have done it as soon as I turned 18," she said. "There was a lot of tension at home. (Now) I don't have to worry about how or what I do is going to affect somebody else. Now it's only going to affect me, and I can make my own choices. And sometimes I make a stupid choice, but I did it myself. I answer to myself."

Living on the street in Portland has been an eye-opener.

"Now that I'm flung into it, I'm a little behind. Gotta catch up. Keep Portland weird? Don't worry, it's weird enough. It's beyond weird," Zaina said, laughing.

She puts her head on the table when asked if it is a strange time to be Muslim:

"Yes it is. Especially when all these rumors haven't died down yet. You know, the rumors about 9/11 and whatnot. They say it's our fault. They say we're the terrorists. And we get our fair share of not-so-nice comments, to say the least."

Zaina said she hoped others would "get the real story. Islam isn't meant to hurt other people. You're supposed to be peaceful.

"Just because one person does something, it doesn't mean all the other people who share something with that person are just like that person. If one person in a specific class gets an "F," it doesn't mean all the others in that class are stupid!"

Zaina said the Quran and the Bible have some similarities, "like the things you're supposed to do. You're supposed to respect your elders. Respect other people. Don't attack unless you absolutely have to. Try to resolve it peacefully. Violence is the last resort. There are a lot of stereotypes that are incorrect."

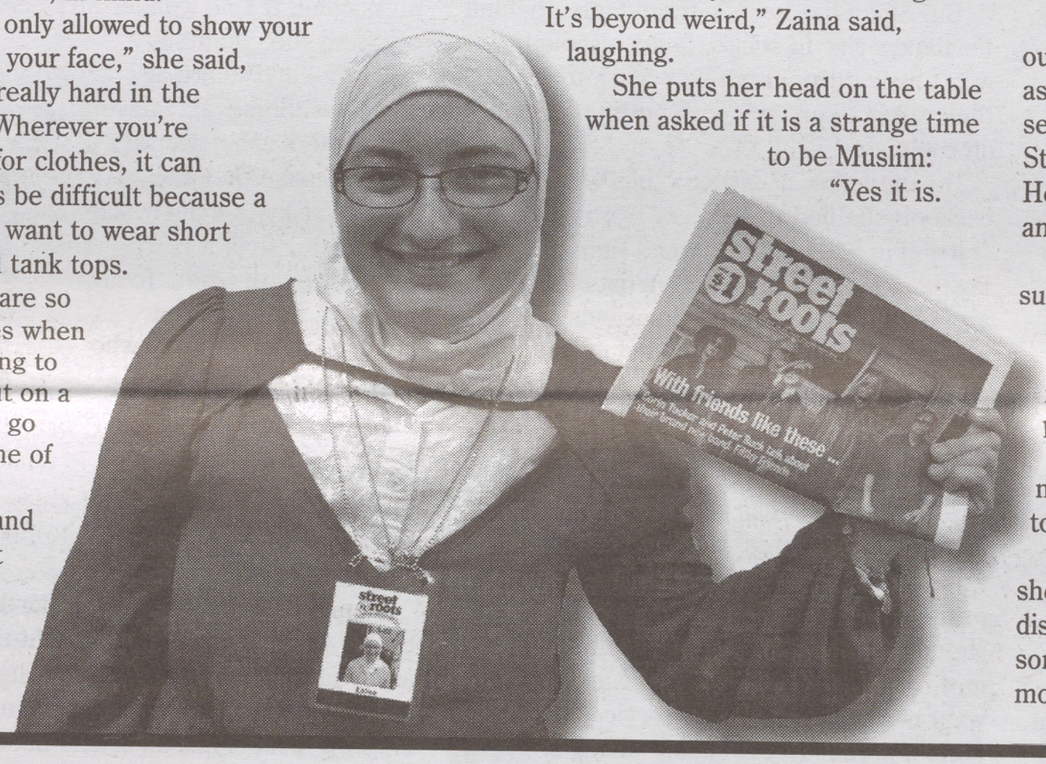
Now Zaina is fighting Muslim stereotypes one smile at a time.

"You try to be calm, useful, help people out if you can," Zaina said. "Even something as simple as a smile can go a long way. I've seen it standing on the corner, selling Street Roots. You get to see a lot of people. Hey, who doesn't want to smile at somebody and get a smile back?"

Through Street Roots, Zaina has found a surrogate family and her first job. When asked about the future, Zaina said, "I used to be able to figure that out, but now with everything – it could go every possible way."

For now, her surrogate family and nonprofit staff regularly check in on Zaina to see how she's doing.

And if she is having a bad day, Zaina said, she falls back on the things that she has discovered are important to her: "I sometimes just walk around, write some more, draw – or go eat some chocolate!"



Sheeptoast

by Elizabeth Considine