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An ultrarunner and cofounder
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RW COVER SEARCH

OPEN FLAP to Meet Finalists!

Rahaf Khatib

32, Stay-at-home mom

Farmington Hills, MI

"I hope to inspire my fellow stay-at-home moms and Muslim American female friends to get active and fit."

#runhappyrunfree

► During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began this year in mid-June, Khatib fasted for 30 days, foregoing food and water for up to 17 hours a day. At sunset, she broke fast, then went to the mosque to pray—hours-long rituals of bowing, rising, and reciting verses from the Qu'ran. Only then, often between the hours of 1 a.m. and 3 a.m., would she hop on the treadmill to complete the 40-plus weekly miles on her training plan for the Chicago Marathon.

Khatib knows not every Muslim—or every runner—would maintain such an intense regimen while fasting. But Khatib has big goals, and not just for her race times. "The Prophet said, 'Come to know each other,'" she says. Through her dedication to the running community, she aims to perform what's called good *da'wah*, breaking down stereotypes and sharing her faith. "It's not forcing it on anyone, just trying to shed light on Islam and what it means to be a Muslim American living in this country."

Other runners on her suburban Detroit streets and tree-lined trails know her on sight. She's the only one they see in hijab, the traditional Muslim headscarf; she covers everything except her hands and face for modesty. She's found other runners open and welcoming, if curious—most frequently, ➔



➔ about how she can run in long pants and sleeves in the summer. “I don’t mind it at all, I get used to it,” she says. “It’s just the way I dress in public.” Sure, she feels hot—but so does everyone when it’s 90 degrees.

As a busy mother of three, her days can feel routine, and her work unappreciated. Over the past three years, she’s regained her self-confidence and sense of worth by participating in a range of events from 5Ks to three marathons. “The running inspired me,” she says. “I really found myself.”

Now, she hopes to guide other Muslim women to her source of strength. She lives a mere 20-minute drive from Dearborn, the town her parents settled in after moving to Detroit from Syria before she was born. The place has a large Muslim community; she believes there’s no reason she shouldn’t see other women in hijab at running groups and races.

Khatib has already persuaded her younger sister to join her for shorter distances and inspired many friends to get active. Last year, she was asked to help organize a 5K during the Islamic Society of North America’s convention in Detroit, and this year, a national group called Muslimahs on the Run approached her about starting a local chapter. “The Prophet, peace be upon him, teaches us to take care of our bodies,” she says. “I preach to my fellow covered sisters that no matter how you look or what you wear, don’t let that stop you from running.” She also hopes to become a voice advocating for more availability of modest active wear for women, Muslim or not.

When marathon week arrived, Chicago forecasters predicted temperatures in the mid- to high 70s. Race organizers sent runners a yellow-alert email, advising against long sleeves and long pants; Khatib could only laugh at the irony. She lined up in a running skirt over tights and a teal zip-up, and topped her hijab with a matching Nike hat to block the sun. If the heat bothered her, you’d never guess—she crossed the finish line with a smile and a 25-minute PR of 4:51:40.

—CINDY KUZMA