

CATHY WURZER: This evening into tomorrow is the beginning of Ramadan, a holy month in which observers fast from sunrise to sunset and turn inward to pray, reflect, and spend time with loved ones. The creators of the podcast *The Digital Sisterhood* hopes to help people do just that.

The show focuses on the stories of Muslim women and covers topics that can be difficult to talk about, like sexual assault and suicide, but the episodes are also full of lighter moments, too. At the beginning of Ramadan last year, host Cadar Mohamud talked with her mom about love. Let's hear a clip from that conversation.

MOTHER: Because you know how long I was waiting you? Almost five years.

WOMAN: Five years.

MOTHER: Yeah.

WOMAN: You couldn't have children for five years.

MOTHER: Yes.

WOMAN: And then you had me.

MOTHER: The day I have was the miracle-- a lot of things miracle happened to me.

CATHY WURZER: Since the show first launched back in 2021, it's drawn a huge international audience. At the end of last year, the podcast had more than 10 million downloads, and Season 3 is due to be released about now. Muna Scekomar is producer and editor of the show. She's one of the founders. She's based in Woodbury, Minnesota, and she joins us right now. Muna, welcome. Thanks for being here.

MUNA SCEKOMAR: Hello, hello. How are you?

CATHY WURZER: I'm great, Muna.

MUNA SCEKOMAR: Thank you for inviting me.

CATHY WURZER: Absolutely. I'm excited to talk with you. Say, before we dive into the podcast, tell me. This is such a holy time in the Muslim world. What's on your mind heading into this time?

MUNA SCEKOMAR: I think it's a wonderful opportunity to reset and to take a pause from the drone of everyday. Everybody's hustling, trying to get something done for themselves. But this is a time to look within. And one of the things I'm focusing on really is to recenter back into the fact that we're human beings in a world that is confusing, and our guidance comes from our one true God, so really reconnecting with the Quran is my mission.

CATHY WURZER: Were you surprised when the first season dropped right in time for Ramadan and a lot of millennial and Gen Z Muslims found it? What were your goals when you started?

MUNA
SCEKOMAR: I think it was really interesting because I randomly picked that date because I'm quite a perfectionist, and I just needed a date to just get out of my head and to put something out there. And so when we picked that date, it happened to be the first Friday of Ramadan, and everybody in Islam everybody tunes into the more spiritual side, the less side that's about enjoyment and more on being aware on conscientious about our purpose.

And so they found this to be a platform that was telling stories and really in-depth vulnerable human stories that captured their interest and forced them-- also challenged them also to look within so I think that it was a beautiful marriage and a merger that we are going to continue the tradition of from now on.

CATHY
WURZER: I listened to a couple of the episodes, and you're right about the emotions. There are a lot of tears shed, a lot of emotions, and there is this beautiful and raw vulnerability to the podcast. How does that happen?

MUNA
SCEKOMAR: Cadar who is the host-- she comes from a very empathetic place where it's like existing and existing to care about others. I like to say at her core she's a sister, and so it comes from that. She really brings it into the podcast. And when she's speaking, you hear the fact that she cares about you as an individual. And everybody says this where it's like, I feel like I've known you for a very long time. That was our first conversation. And it is beautiful that she carries that on.

CATHY
WURZER: I love how you reached out to Cadar on Instagram and said-- what did you say? I'm looking for a host? Or how did that happen?

MUNA
SCEKOMAR: I just said I really loved her vibe I was like, hey. I love your vibe. I love your energy. It seems we really align, and can we hop on a call? It was really out of character for me. I'm not the type of person who just reaches out. But it was about me just putting myself out there and not letting perfectionism get in the path of my creativity and just finding the people.

Because you cannot do anything without people who support you. There's nobody who gets to anywhere walking it alone, so it was me reaching out and God really wrote it that we were the ones who created this beautiful, beautiful platform. And so many other women across the globe have joined to the creation and the production of it. I know you understand and MPR understands more than anyone how much work goes into producing radio and telling stories.

CATHY
WURZER: I love how you created a space where religion and faith and community mix with some really serious and difficult discussions about mental health, sexual trauma, violence, grief, navigating a tough physical diagnosis-- you've got a lot going on. Did you ever get worried about, oh my gosh, we're stepping too far afield here? This is almost too much. Because you're kind of pushing up against some topics that might be considered taboo in many cultures.

MUNA
SCEKOMAR: I think what's taboo for us as human beings is to be imperfect. I think a lot of times media and the social media-- this perfectionist world continues to foster that. And so for us, it's more about reconnecting with the human, reconnecting with the fact that we're not perfect regardless of how much we try to show it.

And let's stop putting that ideal out there as the way to go, and let's set the ideal as a person who's struggling. We're all human beings experiencing life for the first time, so let's go back and focus on that, and let's try to understand it together. And one of the things is that oftentimes-- and it's not unique to just Muslims-- but when it comes to faith and the conversation of being a human being, oftentimes that conversation is approached with a sense of judgment.

Oh, you should be holy or better than or in some capacity. But Islam was sent for the broken. It was sent for the weak. And we really try to bring that back into our conversations.

CATHY

WURZER:

And these conversations are so, as I say, beautifully honest. I was so proud when I was on your website-- and then also I was following you on Instagram and you had 10 million downloads, 10 million listens at the end of last year, I believe. And the podcast has topped the charts in the UK and other countries. It's doing well in the US. I mean, oh my gosh. That must feel so good. How do you measure success?

MUNA

SCEKOMAR:

I think for me one of the things I was I've always said is 2020, the year before I worked on anything, was the most successful year of my life. Because oftentimes, the world calls us to measure success by how many people clap for us and how many people validate you or value your work. But 2020 was the year where I paused, and I started to value myself as just a human.

I used to really suffocate myself because I was like, oh, you're a filmmaker who hasn't produced films. You're a producer who hasn't produced. And it was just there's so many things that was eating me alive. And it was the moment when I said, I am valuable merely by existing, merely by being, and I'm just going to take whatever is around me, and I'm start valuing people that way not because of how entertaining I may be or how much I've produced.

We're in a world of productivity, productivity, productivity. But really, just the experience of trying to be a better person-- that is valuable. So when it came to the numbers and everything, I think it's completely shocking. I always say I'm still processing it. I think it's going to take me another 10 million years to process it, you know? But it's beautiful. It's beautiful.

CATHY

WURZER:

And so for you, it's not really the clicks, the downloads, all of that. It's really you and how you feel about things, how you feel about your life, it sounds like. As you say, we're all kind of living this life, and we're all trying to find out what it's all about. I wish I had more time with you. I do want to ask you about the events. Now, the show is called *The Digital Sisterhood*, and I'm glad you're getting people together in person. What's that like?

MUNA

SCEKOMAR:

It's phenomenal. It's life transforming. It's one of the most warming experiences to just be in a space where so many people feel love, have healed in some capacity by the work that you do, the work that you are honored and selected to be a custodian of. There are so many people that are part of the team. Beautiful Light Studios is precious to my heart, and *The Digital Sisterhood* team as well is doing so well in bringing people together and taking the sisterhood from digital to physical.

I don't even know how to put into words. There was a phenomenal event that was just put together with collaboration in the UK-- first time I went to the UK-- with Modest Vision. But it was just so phenomenal, and it keeps reiterating to me. We're all just human beings trying to survive life. And let's do it without judgment.

CATHY

WURZER:

Muna, I'm going to have to have you back. There's no two ways around it. We got to keep talking. I'm telling you.

MUNA Thank you so much.

SCEKOMAR:

CATHY I really wish you all success, all success to you, Muna. And Ramadan Mubarak.

WURZER:

MUNA Oh, Ramadan Mubarak.

SCEKOMAR:

[SPEAKING NON-ENGLISH]

Thank you.

CATHY Thank you, Muna. We've been talking to Muna Scekomar. She's the producer, the creator, the editor of the
WURZER: podcast *The Digital Sisterhood*. By the way, the show's new season is going to start soon here at the start of Ramadan. And by the way, Ramadan begins this evening, ends in mid to late April. Our friends at *Sahan Journal* have posted a list of Ramadan events around Minnesota. You can find it at mprnews.org.