

# NIAGARA

MAGAZINE

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Niagarans living  
their dreams

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## INDECENT EXPOSURE

In her travels, photographer Tasha Hakeem has boldly documented the many faces of poverty and social injustice. She's approaching her next mission with caution: an exposé of the brutal world of sex trafficking.

**T**asha Hakeem sees the world's injustices through the lens of her camera. And it's through photographs the 30-year-old is hoping to expose issues.

"I hope to bring awareness not only to the issue the photographed person is living with, but also show that they are just that — a person. A person who has value and deserves dignity," she said. Through travelling to the Middle East and South America, Hakeem has discovered just how much inequality people around the world face.

After finishing high school, the Cambridge, Ontario native bought a one-way ticket to England. Over the next few years, she spent one year at University College of the Caribou in Kamloops, B.C. and some time at a Texas Bible school before heading to the University of Waterloo to study fine arts in 1999. Upon graduating in 2001, Hakeem worked at a young offenders' prison. "I've always had a heart for people in need. Working at the young offenders' facility brought that out," she said. "You see improvement over the years and I have a desire to see that in people.

After spending time in Australia and Papua, New Guinea, Hakeem decided to head to the Middle East in 2004. She researched the region's social and political climate and selected Jordan, generally considered to be a safe country. Hakeem also got a fast education about honour killing, a murder, almost exclusively of a woman, who has been perceived to bring shame on their family. "I had to learn how to step out of (a North American) mindset ... to try and wrap my mind around that mindset, to try to understand."

In early 2005, Hakeem voyaged to Hawaii and, later that year, to Brazil. The latter trip was really demanding, as the country has severe problems with homeless children and infanticide. "I was trying to wrap my head around people who are willing to kill for



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Photographer Tasha Hakeem standing in Lake Ontario, Lakeside Park. (Image by Hakeem's Captivating Images from around the world)

the sake of culture instead of preserving a life," she said. "Before Brazil, I had never seen injustice and poverty like that. It was a very challenging trip for me."

After returning from Brazil last June, Hakeem married Nathan, whom she had met in Hawaii, and the couple has lived in Port Dalhousie since. "It's the first full year I've lived in one spot since I left home," she said.

While taking a break from working on exposing social injustice, Hakeem has focused on her business, which involves fine art photography and greeting cards, available at the Village Gallery in Port Dalhousie and the Watering Can and Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines. Ten per cent of retail sales go towards an

international justice organization. Currently working as development co-ordinator at Hanna House, a home that shelters and supports teenage mothers, Hakeem is thinking about tackling the issue of sex trafficking next.

"It's dangerous," she added. "It's not something I'm just going to jump into."

Nathan Hakeem has previously travelled with students to Japan through his work with a missions university, and the couple has recently partnered with Global Youth Network to bring some Brock University students to Japan next year. "We're going to incorporate photography into it, too. I'm really excited about it." -