

Dear Reader,



I'm so happy to be able to share my book with you.

I wrote this story because I know Aussie kids can be anything – clever, cheeky, witty, afraid, sad, brave and everything in between. They can also have different families, cultures, beliefs and backgrounds. That's what makes Aussie kids unique. There is no 'right' way to be, and being different is so incredibly special. No matter who you are, where your family comes from, what you believe, you can still set your mind to the thing that matters most to you and pursue it until you get there.

*Huda and Me* is about a sister and a brother, their own adventure, and their big Lebanese Muslim family. But it's more than that too. It's about a couple of kids who are like so many kids today – living in this beautiful country, but embracing the exceptional pieces within them.

I hope anyone who reads this story embraces every part of themselves.

After I had my first son, I thought a lot about my childhood and all the funny things my siblings and I got up to as kids. I also thought a lot about how some of these memories might form a yarn. I knew for certain that a few good childhood tales don't make a book, so the first thing I did, following some superb advice, was set out to learn how to write a kids' book. I enrolled in Faber Writing Academy at Allen & Unwin's *Writing for Children* course in Melbourne. I still remember the day I stumbled onto the course online – it was one of those especially hot Perth summer days, and I was in my parents' big 1970s-inspired backyard. I remember it clearly because it was one of those moments that changes everything.



I showed up to my first class back in Melbourne and met our teacher – the brilliant, inspired and caring author Kirsty Murray. The three-month course, combined with Kirsty’s support and guidance, had me form the story of *Huda and Me* and begin writing. More than that, I learned everything about how to write, through to submission, publishing and beyond. I went on to enrol in another three or four day-courses with Faber Academy to ‘top me up’ over the following two years – to keep me inspired and up-to-date with what was happening in the world of publishing for children.

I submitted the first chapter of my manuscript to Allen & Unwin through the Friday Pitch. I prayed and then held my breath for two weeks. One afternoon, during a very serious meeting at work, my phone buzzed and I saw an email asking for the rest of my manuscript. Another one of those days that changes everything.

I suppose, at the end of it, the story of *Huda and Me* is simply about two kids, with a simple plan, who conquer their fears and overcome trials to get what they want. My own journey to publication has been much the same.

I hope you enjoy reading this book.

H. Hayek

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