

Nujeen Mustafa Author and Syrian Refugee

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/nujeen-mustafa-author-syrian-refugee/>

This entry is part 3 of 3 in the series [Frankfurt Book Fair 2016](#)

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*This is about my encounter with **Nujeen Mustafa**, an author and Syrian refugee who was at the Frankfurt Buchmesse this year as an author of interest.*

Every once in a rare while, you get to have an experience where in that moment, as it is happening, you can somehow observe yourself and knowingly have a special, quiet thought: “I will always remember this.” That’s what happened to me, in getting to see and listen to Nujeen Mustafa.

I got to experience something really special and rare at the Frankfurt Buchmesse, a thing both global and deeply personal.

Let me share with you a glimpse of Nujeen.

[Patti Buff](#) of the [SCBWI](#) (read my [interview with Patti HERE](#)) and I were able to hang-out during the [Buchmesse](#) a bit, and she invited me and a few other writers to join her in listening to a 17 year old girl who has just become a published author.

[Nujeen Mustafa](#) has written a book about her experience as a refugee, and about traveling to Germany with her sisters, who pushed her – in a wheelchair, because Nujeen has cerebral palsy. She wrote her story with the editorial help and publishing savvy of [Christina Lamb](#), and the book has already been translated into several other languages.

[I want to make sure this book becomes a worldwide hit. Here’s why.](#)

Why I Went to Listen at ALL

I don't often attend author interviews at the Buchmesse, because there is so much to do and most of the time those authors tend to have enormous egos. It's a thing, really it is. (Let's face it: hard to be humble when your books are available in airport bookstores around the world, in various languages, and you have more than one assistant.)

But I thought about it and realized *it could be something special*. So we (Patti and I) agreed to meet at the stage where Nujeen Mustafa would be interviewed.

I'm really glad that I did. Sometimes a quickly made decision, made off the cuff, can change what you think about and what you feel for many days thereafter.

I reached Nujeen's interview just in time and sat next to Patti. We hugged and I settled in. Patti already had a copy of Nujeen's book with her, for the author to sign later. Keen and aware of who this girl was, Patti had purchased her copy online so that she could bring it with her.

I wrinkled my brow. OK. What's next?

Publishing Perspectives & Smart Phones

[Publishing Perspectives](#) has their own stage at the [Buchmesse](#) every year, where they host special interviews and Q&A Panels. Most helpful to book fair attendees is their daily magazine, where (amazingly) all of those events are written about by the next day - so that if you had to miss one of their events, you can still at least read about it at your leisure.

[Olivia Snaije](#), a lady who I admire but do not know personally, interviewed Nujeen. But first, she started with reading an excerpt from Nujeen's book. It made me laugh, because it was a list of "all the things you need to become a refugee." Like what you'd read from a fashion magazine.

Amongst the list was a smart phone, and that rather sobered me up. I've noticed that many Syrian refugees do indeed have smart phones. They may not have a place to stay, but they all have a way of keeping contact with family and friends, to give regular updates.

My Personal Experience

I live in a small German town, and there's a refugee camp just a few doors down from my apartment. So the influx of refugees into my neighborhood is something I feel directly. One of my English students last year was a refugee and there are two other refugees in my daughter's classroom.

If you're wondering, their being here doesn't bother me a bit. I've gotten to know several refugees as people, and they are doing their best in a situation that is far from ideal.

Commonality Strikes

When I listened to Nujeen talk about what she thinks and feels, I really could only wonder at how much like my teenaged-self she is.

I'm a white Christian from New Mexico, a single mom going through menopause. She's a Muslim Syrian refugee teenager with cerebral palsy. We're from different parts of the world, with very different backgrounds.

Could we *really* have that much in common?

Amazingly, as I sat and listened to Nujeen, I kept shaking my head a little. Not in disagreement, but in amazement. I could hardly believe what I was hearing sometimes, because she said the types of things I would have said at that age. It was uncanny.

She's optimistic and sweet and has lots of hope for the future. Things do bother her, of course, but she does her best to deal with those things. Like anyone I'd want to know.

Nujeen Mustafa learned to speak English by watching TV while in Syria. (I learned to speak German by watching TV, another commonality.) There weren't any schools there that could educate her, so she taught herself. Now that she is in Germany, she's learning German - and going to a real school.

What We Write

Should writers be talking about refugees and writing about refugees? You bet.

Even for children's books? I would say, *especially* for children's books. Children are dying, children are escaping, and it's children who are trying to feel at home in a foreign land – knowing and feeling that many people fear and hate them.

What is written down in books matters a great deal, because it gets the conversation going. People are talking about Nujeen's experiences because they're aware of them, or becoming aware of them.

It matters that a refugee teenager has shared her story. But you don't have to be a refugee to write about it. You can create stories that express the deeper meaning, and the calling.

(To read more about [writing for an international audience, GO HERE.](#))

That's something Patti Buff is doing, as it happens. One of the reasons why she wanted to meet Nujeen is because she's written a novel about a refugee and wanted to be sure her depiction was believable. I've no doubt that it is!

Being World Wise as Nujeen Mustafa

What about you? Do you have a story or an autobiography that has changed your perspective of humanity or of a certain culture? Are you *writing a book* that could have that kind of impact? Write below, let me

know – or, as ever, send me an email. You know I love getting those.

Keep creating, no matter what.

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