

ALBERT WHITMAN & COMPANY

Publishing children's books since 1919

Q&A with Anna Perera **Author of *Guantanamo Boy***

1. What inspired you to write the book?

In 2006 I attended a benefit for Reprieve, the nonprofit organization that fights for the rights of people on Death Row and people held at Guantanamo and in secret prisons around the world. When I learned that children were also being held in Guantanamo, I was so shocked and appalled that I decided to write this novel. The title came to me immediately.

2. How did you do the research for the book?

I read everything I could on the subject, including *Enemy Combatant* by Moazzam Begg, *Bad Men* by Clive Stafford Smith, and the play *Guantanamo* by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo. The film *Road to Guantanamo* provided useful visual information, as did various newspapers and TV reports.

3. Have you ever met a real boy from Guantanamo?

No. This book is fiction and I didn't want to steal detainees' stories to write it.

4. What have Muslims in the UK thought of the book?

The Muslims I've been in contact with have sent heartfelt thanks. They've expressed appreciation that the book gives a glimpse of an ordinary Muslim teenager's life after 9/11, but have also been overwhelmed to read about the abuse of human rights, extraditions and treatment of detainees in Guantanamo.

5. Is this a suitable story for young adults?

Yes, because young people hunger and thirst for challenging stories that allow them to make sense of the world they live in. Newsworthy statistics and facts don't stay in the mind the way stories do. There is also lightness, humor, love, and forgiveness here, encouraging readers who follow Kahild's extraordinary journey to ask questions about the "war on terror" and the use of torture. Young people are the future, and I hope this story will help them create a fairer, kinder world.

6. How did you prepare yourself emotionally for writing this book?

Whenever something challenging appears in my life, I meditate to achieve clarity. Before I began writing each day, I went to a place of deep inner peace and asked for guidance. This helped me write with detachment.

7. You've published books for younger children in the past, but the idea for *Guantanamo Boy* first inspired you to write for teens. Are you writing more books for a young adult audience?

Yes—my latest novel, *The Glass Collector*, was just published in the UK and Australia, and will be released in the US in March. It's set in Cairo, Egypt, and tells the story of a Coptic Christian teenager. I have a third novel in the works as well. I feel completely at home writing YA, and I'll continue to work in this genre long after my reading glasses are fitted with telescopic lenses!

--over--

8. Any final thoughts?

Throughout history, rules of division and separation have killed and harmed innocent people without measure—and to what effect? I'm a pacifist, so how was it going to be possible to encourage compassion and the desire for peace by holding up a mirror to the insanity of this prison? All I can say is, I was compelled to try.

#

Publicity Contact: Susannah Greenberg
646-801-7477
publicity@bookbuzz.com

Marketing Contact: Michelle F. Bayuk
847-232-2811
mbayuk@albertwhitman.com

Guantanamo Boy by Anna Perera

978-0-8075-3077-7 \$17.99

Ages 13-up

August 2011

Jacketed Hardcover