

Laura Shovan 0:00

[COLD OPEN] Hi, this is Laura Shovan, author of *The Last Fifth Grade of Emerson Elementary*, *Takedown* and co-author of *A Place at the Table*. I identify as a white, Jewish, first generation American woman, and poet in the schools.

Saadia Faruqi 0:17

This is Saadia Faruqi, author of the *Yasmin* series and other books for kids. I'm a Muslim American woman of Pakistani background.

Laura Shovan 0:26

My friend Saadia Faruqi and I will be joining you soon on the podcast to talk about the middle grade novel we wrote together. It's about two first generation American girls, one Muslim, one Jewish, who meet in an after school cooking club.

Saadia Faruqi 0:42

But I'd also like to use my privilege to boost black voices. I'd like to recommend two picture books by black American authors. *Not Quite Snow White* by Ashley Franklin, and *Your Name Is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow. These are both wonderful authors with lots to say, and you'll really enjoy these books.

Laura Shovan 1:06

I'd like to recommend a book by black authors and publishers. Wade and Cheryl Willis Hudson. It's an anthology for kids called *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices*. Be sure to begin with the Hudsons' introduction to this book of poems, essays and art by diverse creators. The anthology was inspired by the Hudson's great niece, who was frightened and confused about what was happening in our country. The Hudsons write: Yes, we are living in challenging times. But we created this book so you will know that you are part of a community that loves you and can give you tools to help navigate the present and the future. This book is a gift and I hope it's one that you enjoy.

Heidi Rabinowitz 2:03

[MUSIC, INTRO] This is *The Book of Life*. I'm Heidi Rabinowitz. Muslim author Saadia Faruqi and Jewish author Laura Shovan joined me today to talk about the middle grade novel they wrote together, called *A Place at the Table*. This is a book about immigration, about friendship, and it will make you hungry. Have a listen, and then check out BookofLifePodcast.com for links to Saadia and Laura's other work. B'tay avon. Good appetite!

Laura Shovan 2:41

Saadia Faruqi, Laura Shovan, welcome to *The Book of Life*. Please give us a brief description of *A Place at the Table*.

Speaker 1 2:49

A Place at the Table is about two girls, Sara, who is at a big public American middle school for the very first time; she has been going to a close knit and very small, private Muslim school. And she is taken to the after school cooking club by her mother because her mother's teaching the after school cooking lessons. And she meets Elizabeth, who is a Jewish, half-British, American girl, and they don't think they have anything in common but very quickly find out that both of their mothers are immigrants and both families are struggling with assimilation in very different ways. So that is the start of their story. What would you call their relationship at first Saadia?

Saadia Faruqi 3:41

I think that's it's like a rocky friendship. If you're a reader you know they're gonna be friends, but it's gonna take them a while to get there.

Gail Carson Levine 3:48

It's not friendship love at first sight.

Saadia Faruqi 3:50

Right. But that's so true of a lot of us in real life as well.

Gail Carson Levine 3:56

Yeah, I think one of the things that I really love about the book is it shows that good friendship is worth putting work into.

Saadia Faruqi 4:03

Well, just thinking of my 10 year old daughter who sometimes complains about her friends, and how they're not easy. And I have to tell them that, you know, it's hard work to be friends and to maintain that.

Laura Shovan 4:14

Yeah, at all ages. That's important. How does it work to co-author a novel?

Saadia Faruqi 4:20

How does it work? Someone tell us!

Heidi Rabinowitz 4:24

Yeah. Like, did you plan it all out beforehand? Did you... one person writes and then the other person responds, like, how did you...

Saadia Faruqi 4:31

We did a lot of planning and talking and thinking, and...

Gail Carson Levine 4:34

...we did have to decide, once we had an outline, which scenes were going to be in which girl's voice. But it's a fascinating question, because we've talked to other author pairs, and everybody's process is a little bit different.

Saadia Faruqi 4:48

Yeah.

Laura Shovan 4:48

Saadia wrote the first chapter, I would read her chapter, maybe send some notes and feedback, do some light editing, and then I would go on and write my chapter and she would do the same for me. So It's not as if we wrote two separate stories and kind of smushed them together. Even though we each wrote one girl's voice, it was a very integrated process.

Saadia Faruqi 5:11

It was step by step, you couldn't just do your own bit and then stitch them together. I think at one point, somewhere along the line, we tried that for a few chapters. "Okay, you're, you're taking too long, let me just skip ahead and start writing." But it did not go very well. Because, you know, whatever would happen in my chapter had to go off of what had just happened in yours. And so we quickly realized that we had to kind of

work at the pace that was comfortable for both of us. It was, throughout, a learning process. We were figuring it out and really improving and modifying and polishing the way we were doing things.

Laura Shovan 5:48

We're talking about friendship and the need to be vulnerable and kind of put your ego aside when you're co authoring a book. And I remember there was a chapter that I wrote and we decided that that scene needed to be switched over to Sara's character. And I think it works really well like that. But that, that kind of thing...

Saadia Faruqi 6:08

...it's hard to let go or it's hard to write chapters and then decide, well, we're not going to put this in the book at all, or, you know, several times multiplied than just doing it yourself because you're not the only person.

Laura Shovan 6:20

What was the initial spark that brought this book into being?

Gail Carson Levine 6:24

I had wanted to write a story about my family. So this character is loosely based on my childhood. My mom came from Great Britain before I was born and married my father, who's from the Bronx and Jewish, and she gave up everything. She gave up her religion, her culture, her family, and found it very, very hard. I look back now and realize that, in part from conversations Saadia and I have had, because my mom looks, you know, American--she's blonde, she has blue eyes, and is a native English speaker--I think people didn't realize that she needed help and support. So I wanted to look at that. But I also felt like a story needs an anchor. It needs something to sort of ground it. And I was speaking with my agent and he happened recommend to me that I might want to think about doing a co authored middle grade book, just the two things came together. I knew Saadia was a fairly recent citizen. And I had this idea sort of percolating. And that's when I asked her if she wanted to work on a book about two girls whose mothers are both struggling with the citizenship process.

Saadia Faruqi 7:39

I had not considered writing with somebody before. I know my own temperament. And I know I can be very controlling and I'm very specific about how I do things. And so I was curious, you know, how would that even work?

Gail Carson Levine 7:52

Saadia, like I was saying that the story needed some kind of grounding in something, and the cooking theme was what Saadia brought to the table.

Saadia Faruqi 8:00

Yeah, I don't even know where that came from, because I am like the opposite of Sara's mother who cooks constantly, I hardly ever cook. But everything I write has a lot of cooking themes in it. It's one of those things which I see that it's missing in me, but I see the importance of it. And I see it all around me in specially in immigrant families, because the sense of home and familiarity, and so every book I've written and write and continue to write will always have these big food themes in it.

Gail Carson Levine 8:31

I remember you saying to me how immigrants coming to the US, especially women, often have to rely on their soft skills to succeed here. And so to me, it made a lot of sense that Sara's mother would be cooking, which, you know, she clearly loves and is good at, but there, there is a point in the story where she's just like, I'm just constantly cooking for people. And you can feel that frustration that, you know, in a way, she feels reduced from from what she was in Pakistan to having this catering business.

Saadia Faruqi 9:05

Yeah. I mean, we don't really value things like cooking and cleaning and taking care of your kids and the things that are considered as household chores and building a business around cooking is seen as not as amazing as building a business around something else.

Laura Shovan 9:23

So I wanted to ask both of you, what was your relationship before you wrote this book together? And has your relationship changed as you've written the book?

Saadia Faruqi 9:32

I don't think we really knew each other that well,

Gail Carson Levine 9:35

We met through pitch wars.

Saadia Faruqi 9:37

Yeah, Laura mentored me unofficially, with some of my early writing to the much more experienced writer I was just starting out.

Laura Shovan 9:46

But now this was... it was a leap of faith on both our parts.

Saadia Faruqi 9:52

But then this book really kind of pushed us, we just spent a year together constantly. You know, hours and hours on the phone together, sometimes we would like actually write chapters while we were on the phone because it was just not able to get it done separately.

Laura Shovan 10:11

And I think we got to know each other really well. For this book, I was looking at some of the mental health issues that families experience alongside immigration. And that was challenging because I knew that my family might feel uncomfortable about it. So to have a writing partner who was saying, No, you have to tell that story. And to have that encouragement was really important for me.

Saadia Faruqi 10:33

Yeah, we were in it together. So I love how the book has been kind of the reason why we've come together.

Gail Carson Levine 10:42

You know, some of the issues that Sara and Elizabeth have to work out, some of the things that they share with each other about faith, about what they're experiencing with their families, the friendships that they're growing into and growing out of, these are all things that Saadia and I talked about on an adult level. And have woven their way into the story.

Saadia Faruqi 11:03

Yeah, I mean, literally, we have a conversation and now it's in the book. It's been a very interesting and very meaningful process.

Laura Shovan 11:11

What were your biggest challenges in writing the story?

Saadia Faruqi 11:14

Working with another person to write a book, or do any kind of creative thing, I think is a huge challenge. And my husband, I don't know if I've ever told you Laura, but he was so worried about us. He's always: don't do anything to spoil your friendship, just be chill, you always fight with people, don't do that! I'm like, I know what I'm doing, nothing's gonna happen. It's interesting, working with somebody on a project and then wanting to make sure the relationship is maintained when you're doing something that's already difficult.

Laura Shovan 11:49

I really appreciate that, Saadia, because I just can remember you saying that the friendship has to come first. And I know that's been really helpful for us because when there have been a few bumps, knowing that that's what we value above the other things is important to getting through whatever we have to work through.

Saadia Faruqi 12:08

I mean, it's a book, right? Not the end of the world. What else? What other challenges did we have?

Laura Shovan 12:16

I don't remember if it was you or... my brother reads for me quite often, he's an early reader. And there was one scene, one of the characters came across as just being really, really angry. And I remember Saadia saying, like, This scene is too long, and my brother was like, This person is too angry. And just as a human being to be able to say, I have to write it this way at least once because this is how I felt as a child. This is how it appeared to me. And to have the trust of Saadia to say, you know, I need to write it this way one time and I will come back and I will adjust it, it will be okay. And for her to trust that was a really important thing.

Saadia Faruqi 12:58

Well, that was a difference in the writing style, like I've never done where I have written things and said I'll come back to it later. But it's been very, very interesting for me to see how you work. That's one of my key things as an interfaith activist and anything that I do, to see how other people do things. Because just because that's not my way of doing it doesn't mean that doesn't have value. And I could actually learn something from it. So yeah, those are some challenges. I also thought that one other big challenge was what we were actually writing about, because it was quite a tough topic. I mean, there is Islamophobia in there. There's racism and there are a lot of times I was thinking, do we want to go there? Do we want to really lay it bare like that, where we're showing a very ugly aspect of society? We're writing for kids, we're usually encouraged to you know, just tie neat little bows, and redemption in the characters and things like that. So, just struggling with the subject matter and wanting to be true to actual children's experiences was always a tension in my mind as we were writing.

Laura Shovan 14:10

Right. And I think it was also really valuable to be able to talk about, when a family is white, they're going to have a very different experience of being an immigrant than a family that's brown or black.

Saadia Faruqi 14:25

Yeah.

Laura Shovan 14:25

And one of the things I know Elizabeth realizes is Yeah, her mother is, is struggling, but people don't realize that she quote unquote, doesn't belong until she opens her mouth and then you know, when people hear the accent, then they identify it, but she can sort of slide through and not appear to be different if she doesn't want to think that's a big--

Saadia Faruqi 14:49

Also, all accents are not equal, right? The British accent is like seen as a good thing. "Wow. You're, you have a British accent. You're like royalty." Whereas people like me used to practice in front of the mirror to change my accent when I first came to this country. But what does that do to you as a person, if even those intrinsic parts of you, you actively have to change to be accepted?

Laura Shovan 14:55

Yeah, and you have that section pretty early in the book where Sara's talking about, um, which I think-- I was just listening, Heidi, to the episode about the Yiddish books, and that experience of the parents speaking the language of the culture of origin and children responding in English.

Saadia Faruqi 15:30

So universal.

Laura Shovan 15:32

What is it about the immigrant experience that you want readers to take away with them from this book?

Gail Carson Levine 15:38

We did a panel at NCTE with other authors who either were immigrants to this country or first generation American. And one of the things in preparing for the panel was we found a sort of an academic article that identified five or six areas of stress for immigrant families. I think it really spoke to all of us. There was the financial strain. There were the issues of assimilation. Can you think of the other ones, Saadia? I think there was loss of culture, was one of them.

Saadia Faruqi 16:09

Yeah, language. I feel like we touched almost all of them in our book, we kind of did a broad sweep of all the major things that an immigrant family, whether it's the parent or the kids, would go through. It's more obvious in my character's family. Both her parents are immigrants versus in your character only one is. So you know, when you're an immigrant, you have to start from scratch as an adult. I feel envious of my kids because they won't have that point where now we have to start from scratch like I did, or my husband did in our 20s, late 20s for my husband.

Gail Carson Levine 16:53

I think we wanted to show that the immigrant experience is complex for families and even though the first generation children are born here in America, they are also dealing with a lot of these issues that their parents are facing, or they're dealing with the echoes of those issues. You know, it can cause a lot of stress on kids, especially, I think setting the book in middle school. That's a time when children are starting to establish who they are outside of their family. And it's especially true for Sara because she has left this close knit Muslim elementary school. So it's kind of like...

Saadia Faruqi 17:32

Everything, it's everything.

Laura Shovan 17:34

Yeah.

Saadia Faruqi 17:35

Like an avalanche of things. I read this in a craft book for writing one time, which like struck me as odd but I'm really I'm taking it to heart: whatever you think your protagonist is facing, just like load everything on them, the worst that can happen, and that's what makes the real heroes. I tried for my part also to show a little bit a different kind of immigrant family in that this family is educated. We just have these narratives of refugees and immigrants who are completely clueless. They're not speaking the language. They're struggling because of basic things. And that's true of so many people. But first of all, it wasn't my experience, thankfully, knowing English, being educated in your own country before you come here, and being in an industry where you can start up again, that's also the experience of a lot of people, but it's a positive one. And so unfortunately, media overall doesn't like to showcase those happy stories too much. And so I wanted to show a side of immigration where the parents can talk English and they're actually doing pretty well. It's just little things like they've got debt and they've got stressors and people are shouting mean things to them.

Laura Shovan 18:49

That's a really important point, is that part of what we wanted to show is that there are commonalities to the immigrant experience, especially for first generation American children, but there are also really huge differences. And there is not one way to tell the immigrant story.

Heidi Rabinowitz 19:05

Do you have any advice for kids or even for adults who, like the girls in this story, want to befriend someone who's from a different culture, but maybe they're nervous about taking that first step?

Saadia Faruqi 19:20

I actually used to have this rule for my own children, that wherever you go where there are kids, if you see somebody sitting alone, you have to go make friends with them, and I kind of enforced it. Because when we would go home, I would be like, so how many new friends did you make? Now my daughter who's in fifth grade, literally, her circle of friends are all the newcomers and all the kids who nobody else makes friends with. She often laughs about it that you know, "SHE didn't have a friend and SHE didn't have a friend and now we're all friends." And how cool is that?

Heidi Rabinowitz 19:52

That is cool. That's wonderful.

Saadia Faruqi 19:54

It's not that hard. Just go find that one person who's sitting alone. It's sad how these social kind of situations happen in middle school. Thankfully, I did not grow up here. That's the one part of the American experience I would never have wanted to have anyway is like middle school and high school. The bar is kind of low, just go and sit with the person who's all alone. And you won't even really have to do anything. You'll be friends before you know it.

Laura Shovan 20:23

I love that. Laura, did you have anything you wanted to add to that?

I think the only thing I would add is, and this is for adults, too, when you're having a conversation with a group. If you see that somebody in the group isn't adding anything, you know, take a minute to ask that person a question or ask them what they think about the conversation. It's very simple to do that. And then the person can decide if they do want to speak or not. But sometimes people like to be invited, which I think is similar to what Saadia is saying is extending that invitation, even just turning, like physically turning your body to that person and saying please add to our conversation is... sometimes that's the starter that people need, whether they're kids or adults.

Okay, good. So from the title A Place at the Table, all the way through the book, obviously this is a very food centered story. The girls are cooking in their cooking club together. And there are recipes at the back of the book. Did you test all of the recipes that are mentioned in the story?

Saadia Faruqi 21:26

One of us did and it wasn't me!

Gail Carson Levine 21:30

I did, actually it was really funny because Saadia would suggest a recipe for them to make, I think the first one was the tahari rice...

Saadia Faruqi 21:38

That one I have made a lot of times.

Gail Carson Levine 21:41

Rice with potato and peas in my version, so Saadia would send me YouTube videos.

Saadia Faruqi 21:47

Oh my god, lots of YouTube videos. My husband at one point was very excited because he thought finally this woman is gonna start cooking because she's watching all these videos. And I was like, No, no, no, that's all for Laura. She's cooking.

Laura Shovan 22:01

...videos, I would make the dish, I would send her the pictures, we'd have a little, like, critique. The funniest one was I made samosas because they make it in the story. I'm just a very sensory writer. So I need to, as much as possible, do the thing that my characters are doing. And I made samosas and Saadia said, "Oh, they look amazing." And I don't know how it came up. But you said, remember you said "you made the dough?! Nobody makes the dough!" But I bake so I-- you know, making the dough to me was the easy part.

Saadia Faruqi 22:35

It was amazing. Yeah, I don't know. Maybe some old school people do but that's why we have puff pastries and all these kinds of things. No, I have not heard of people making dough. But then I've not heard of people making samosas, period. You just go to the store and buy them.

Laura Shovan 22:52

My family was not complaining. I think this is their favorite research that I have done.

Saadia Faruqi 22:56

Yeah. Well, I mean, I appreciate that because if neither of us had done it we wouldn't have probably come up with such an authentic narrative. But it was nice. I actually felt very flattered because it's a very common issue for first generation kids, where you know, you have all these stories of these kids bringing their own kind of food from home for their lunch to school and other kids making fun of the smell or the look or something. And so, a lot of times I had not realized how much I internalize a lot of those feelings. Of course I'm an adult and I'd be like, you know, who are you to tell me my food is weird, but there's still some part of you inside that does feel kind of a bit sad or worried or stressed out. What are people going to say if I'm sitting with people and eating this instead of pizza? It was a very good feeling to have you, Laura, do that kind of cooking and be equally excited about the fact that you're cooking of this cuisine of which you have no connection culturally.

Laura Shovan 24:01

And it was a very interesting experience. One of the things it taught me was it really drove home the point to me that in families when we learn a recipe from a family member, when we make a recipe we're transmitting culture along with the recipe and stories and you know, memories, I used to make this, right, with my grandfather...

Saadia Faruqi 24:21

...saw my mom make this all the time, or my grandma used to make this on special occasions. We all have those stories.

Gail Carson Levine 24:28

Yeah, so sometimes just having a video in front of me, and it was cool and everything, but I felt the missing of that. You know that I wasn't learning this recipe standing next to somebody in the kitchen and really feeling it. I do want to share a story, I don't think I've ever told you this Saadia, but this is like a food culture story. It's a little bit different. For a few years, I went to a Jewish summer camp for girls in upstate New York and I remember one of the first nights we were there I had my knife and fork and I was holding them European style. I just remember, I think it was the counselors or some of the older girls, they just were like, what is that all about? So it can be really subtle, but I think kids are aware.

Saadia Faruqi 25:11

That was probably the most fun part of the whole writing process, you know, searching the recipes and then watching all these videos, and I would send you the nice videos, I had to watch a ton of crappy videos to get to that one, nice one.

Laura Shovan 25:26

I remember I found one and you said, Laura, can you follow this video it's in Urdu, and I was like...

Saadia Faruqi 25:32

Yes, a lot of them weren't even in English. So you know, I had to find one that had the subtitles for at least the ingredients because you don't need to know what gossipy stuff they're talking about while they're cooking, which is very Pakistani as well, but knowing what ingredients to put in there and how much, that was necessary. So we actually, I ended up putting that as, like, not a character but that's what she does...

Laura Shovan 25:59

Oh yeah. She's based, the Salma Auntie, she's based on one particular YouTuber.

Saadia Faruqi 26:04

She's an amalgamation of all the different Auntie's who were cooking in the videos, like why not give her a name and actually have them follow because that's so much more interesting than just, you know.

Laura Shovan 26:17

The cultures being represented in this book, there's the Muslim Pakistani culture, there's the Jewish culture and British culture. So for people who would like to try foods from any of those cultures, but aren't familiar with them, could you recommend a good sort of starter dish for Pakistani food, for Jewish food, for British food?

Gail Carson Levine 26:40

I think the tahari rice is something families could make together.

Saadia Faruqi 26:43

Yeah, although you know, I never even heard about it growing up.

Laura Shovan 26:46

Oh, really?

Saadia Faruqi 26:47

Yeah. Because it's vegetarian and everything in my house had meat in it. So when my husband family, vegetarians, so when I got married, I'm like, oh, there's a rice with no meat? What is this? So yeah, but that's very simple to make, something like paratha is very universal. It's harder to make but you can get it a lot of places. Naan. We didn't have any kind of barbecued items in our book like tikka or kebab or something. Those are kind of go-to easy ones as well.

Gail Carson Levine 27:18

Yeah, and I would say for British culture, you can't go wrong with tea and scones. It's not in the book but our favorite savory meat recipe is shepherd's pie. We make shepherd's pie with ground turkey with the, either the mashed potato or sometimes we do sweet potato or sometimes even mashed cauliflower on top. It's a very adaptable recipe and we would love that one. For Jewish culture, I mean, there are so many wonderful foods, you know the latkes are probably the one... and I really wanted to get the sufganiyot in the story because so many Americans associate latkes with Hanukkah, so to show that other tradition of having the jelly donuts. And that was another one where I'd really wanted to find a great recipe. And what I ended up finding out was, I think for most jelly donut recipes you make like a dough ball and fry it and then you inject it with jam. But we found this recipe where you make the dough into two thin discs. And you actually put the jelly in first.

Saadia Faruqi 28:24

Oh my god, like paratha.

Gail Carson Levine 28:26

Yeah, you make the jelly. You put the jelly in the middle and you squish the edges. And you let it rise again. And so you're frying it with the jelly in it, but they came out so much better.

Saadia Faruqi 28:37

Yeah, that's how people, a lot of people make parathas. They make two sides and then because paratha has to have some kind of butter or oily kind of substance in between, ghee which is clarified butter. It's what we would use that you join them together and my mom didn't do it like that. She used to call that the non expert way to make it

Laura Shovan 28:57

The cheater's way.

Saadia Faruqi 28:58

Yeah, but I mean it works. I didn't realize you would make donuts that way too.

Gail Carson Levine 29:03

Yeah, I thought it was funny in the book when the girls are making the samosas they have this conversation where they're talking about knish and parathas and street food and how every culture has this sort of like fried dough packets with something yummy in them.

Saadia Faruqi 29:20

Always. We had a lot of food conversations, it's what brings us together, it really does.

Gail Carson Levine 29:26

When we first talked to our editor about the book, if I remember right, she said, Jennifer Greene, said something along the lines of people's first sort of dipping their toes into a new culture is usually through food. That's stuck with me.

Laura Shovan 29:40

That makes sense. So it's tikkun olam time. This is your opportunity to invite listeners to take some kind of action to help heal the world. So I'd like each of you to share your thoughts on that.

Gail Carson Levine 29:55

So we were talking a little bit before about inviting people into a conversation. I think one way to repair the world is to invite people to tell their stories. It's, it's something I do as a teacher of poetry when I'm working with kids, but I would like to invite children, first generation American children in particular, but any, any children with family members or elders, who came to this country from elsewhere, to start a conversation and ask the person who immigrated from another country, something about their life in the other country. If you want to start with food, a recipe, a food memory is a really good question to ask. What do you remember about somebody making a favorite dish of yours? And if there's any food in particular that they miss from the culture of origin. So I would like to invite kids especially to begin a conversation and find out more about their families' cultures of origin just through, not a formal interview, but a more informal conversation.

Heidi Rabinowitz 31:02

Very nice.

Saadia Faruqi 31:05

I have been thinking so much about the environment these days, you know, the different way that people can do their little bit in trying to heal the environment. And for me that's planting trees, and so I've identified in my local community, a couple of organizations that have volunteer efforts where they'll assign a date, and then people come from the community and there's a tract of land and they'll plant 100 trees or so, getting your hands dirty, and doing just a little bit of effort to get what my daughter calls the lungs of the earth, plant a tree or 100 trees or however many you can. And there are a lot of organizations worldwide like that.

Laura Shovan 31:51

There must be places where you can donate money to have somebody else, get their hands dirty, and plant a tree on your behalf. If you're not somebody who wants to dig?

Saadia Faruqi 32:02

I feel, I've found when I go and do a little bit of that thing myself, whatever the cause is, I feel more passionately about it, I really understand it much better. It's given me a little hope to think about that, that okay, all is not lost. Maybe it just needs a very, very big effort, but plant a tree.

Laura Shovan 32:22

Great, thank you. Is there anything else that either of you would like to talk about that I haven't thought to ask you?

Saadia Faruqi 32:29

I do a lot of interfaith work, and I always tell people that Jews and Muslims are so similar. We have these political issues and we have these weird kind of fights going on. But if you learn about both religions, they are so similar even in the words that we use, even in I mean, Arabic and Hebrew are so similar as languages, it's

amazing. There might be a few differences, but they're overwhelmingly so many similarities and we can be friends if we just kind of work at it.

Laura Shovan 33:00

I'm just thinking about, Saadia, you had published a poem in Blue Minaret. It's called My Best Friend Is Jewish by Briana Naseer, it's about these two girls and one is Jewish one is Muslim, and they're just friends. And this adult comes along and is like, hey, you're not supposed to be friends. They're just like, shut up.

Saadia Faruqi 33:21

Yeah. I'm the editor in chief of this really small blog kind of thing. We publish poetry and short stories and some art by Muslim people mostly, there are a few who are not Muslim, but they're kind of about just to showcase the different talents and the showcase a different side of Muslims and not what more mainstream media portrays. Yeah, there's a lot of nice stuff in there.

Laura Shovan 33:46

Well, so speaking of your blog, BlueMinaret.com, I just wanted to invite each of you to tell us where people can find you online and if there are any other particular projects you're engaged in that you want to shout out

Saadia Faruqi 34:01

Lots of projects, too many projects!

Gail Carson Levine 34:03

Alright, while you're thinking about that, my website is LauraShovan.com and as far as projects are concerned, not every Friday but many Fridays I blog with a group called Poetry Friday. And we all blog about something poetry related, much of it children's poetry related and it's a wonderful blogging community and a lot of children's authors and teachers and librarians participate in that. We have a different host every week. So if you search Poetry Friday, you should be able to find it.

Laura Shovan 34:41

Okay. Saadia, did you have any other projects besides Blue Minaret that you wanted to mention or do you have a web address where people can find you?

Saadia Faruqi 34:50

I do. It's just my name SaadiaFaruqi.com. If you're on Twitter or Instagram, you can find me, it's still my name, Saadia Faruqi, as long as you spell it correctly, you'll find me. I have other books coming out, I have a series for younger kids called the Yasmin series.

Gail Carson Levine 35:08

I'm speaking for both of us Saadia, but we're hoping to have conversations hosted by Jewish groups and Muslim groups and just get people talking. And use the girls in the story kind of as a model, like we were saying in the beginning, just the fact that yes, friendships can be challenging, but the results if you're willing to work on them is positive for everybody.

Laura Shovan 35:32

Saudia Farooqi, Laura Shovan, thank you so much for joining me here on The Book of Life.

Gail Carson Levine 35:37

Thank you, Heidi. We've really enjoyed the conversation.

Saadia Faruqi 35:41

Yeah, it was very meaningful and I loved it. Thank you. Thank you.

Gail Carson Levine 35:49

Hi, this is Gail Carson Levine, author of the ceiling made of eggshells. I will be joining you soon on the Book of Life podcast in 14 92 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella offered Spain's Jews a choice, convert or leave. My episode is dedicated to the Jews who left though they faced a hostile Europe and Mediterranean Sea plagued by pirates.

Heidi Rabinowitz 36:30

[MUSIC, OUTRO] Don't be a stranger, say hi to Heidi at 561-206-2473 or BookofLifepodcast@gmail.com. Check out our Book of Life podcast Facebook page, or our Facebook discussion group in Jewish Kidlit Mavens. We are occasionally on Twitter too at BookofLifepod. Want to read the books featured on the show? Buy them through Bookshop.org/shop/bookoflife to support the podcast and independent bookstores at the same time. You can also help us out by becoming a monthly supporter through Patreon, or making a one time donation to our home library, the Feldman Children's Library at Congregation B'nai Israel of Boca Raton, Florida. You'll find links for all of that and more at BookofLifepodcast.com. Our background music is provided by the fFreilachmakers Klezmer String Band. Thanks for listening and happy reading!

EDITOR'S NOTE: After this audio was transcribed, the dedication was updated. The new dedication is by Evan Wolkenstein and Joanne Levy and it says: Hi, I'm Joanne Levy, author of Fish Out of Water. And this is Evan Wolkenstein, author of Turtle Boy. And we hope you'll join us for our joint episode of The Book of Life podcast where we'll talk about our books with Heidi and each other. With the state of the world amid this time of COVID19 we recognize that many bar and bat mitzvahs have been postponed, shortened, moved, or held online and we would like to dedicate our episode to anyone who has had to roll with the changes. Yeah, we know that the resilience to roll with these changes is something that you can actually use to motivate action and growth, so even though you may not have requested, it can actually be an incredible opportunity, like so many of the challenges that strike the characters in our books. Mazel tov to all!

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>