Episode Transcript for Interview with Veera Hiranandani
Episode Duration: 42:02

[Music interlude fades in]

Jennifer Baker
Hello and welcome to the 10th anniversary year of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. I'm your host, Jennifer Baker. The minorities in publishing podcast first aired on August 14, 2014, and this year, I'll be celebrating with new guests, return guests, and some book giveaways for new and returning listeners. You may know you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com, as well as on Twitter and Instagram at minorities in pub. You can also sign up for the monthly MIP newsletter for info on new episodes, guests and industry news as well as job or writing opportunities. Minorities in Publishing is available wherever you listen to podcasts, including Spotify, Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, TuneIn and iHeartRadio. It's also available on the podcasting hosting server, Libsyn—l, i, b, s, y, n. Thanks so much for listening, and hope you enjoy this episode. [music fades out]

Hey, everybody, and happy summer it is technically officially summer at least where Vera and I are. And I am as always ecstatic to talk to folks in general, but especially to talk to Veera Hiranandani because I feel like we've been in each other's orbit a lot.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah.

Jennifer Baker
And now we get to actually have a sit down.

Veera Hiranandani
Yes. I'm so excited to be here. Thanks for having me.

Jennifer Baker
Thank you for being on and taking the time to talk to me. And Veera Hiranandani is the author of *Amil and the After*, and has done several books for young readers including *The Night Diary.* Would you consider *The Night Diary* and *Amil and the After* companion pieces?

Veera Hiranandani
I would. They definitely… It's nice to read them consecutively because you just get a richer understanding of all the characters, you know, you can go directly to *Amil and the After*, and you'll know what's going on. So you can read it separately, but it's even better together even better.

Jennifer Baker

And so *Amil* came out earlier this year from where we're talking. And *The Night Diary* came out a few years ago, it got so much praise as has *Amil*. And it got the Newbery Honor, it was honored by a cavalcade of spaces, starred reviews, again, *Amil* also had several star reviews. And I think in this space, especially when we're writing for younger people gets kind of helpful, and to some extent important to note that because it's helping us connect more with the educators, the teachers, we're getting these books in the kids hands, hopefully, especially as we see book banning rise exponentially in the past two years.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, I think just the writing space is being challenged in a lot of different ways, and particularly the middle grade space right now. And things are just becoming a little harder to just get seen get known get out there. And I think that anything from BIPOC authors, marginalized voices, it's just then that added layer with look banning, it just makes it even more challenging. So I'm grateful for the good reviews and the sort of verification in that sense that those outside reviews sometimes give your book—of course, you know, there are many great books out there, and there are all kinds of reviews out there—but it made me really feel great because I didn't know how people would respond to this companion follow up to *The Night Diary* years later. It's not like I released it one year later. So I was hoping, you know, people kind of remembered the night diary and then wanted to continue the story in this way. We're just gather new readers to this world. So I'm just glad for people like you to just kind of lift up our voices and get our stories out there.

Jennifer Baker
Yeah, and it's such a beautiful story because it's following young Amil, 12 years old. And it's 1948. His family, his sister, who we followed in *The Night Diary*, who wrote letters, right? It was a more pistolero book, right? Yeah, in *The Night Diary*. They're dealing with Partition. And I hesitate to say Partition is over, by the time we get to Amil's story, because things like that don't end.

Veera Hiranandani
No. And that was really what I wanted to explore for a number of different reasons. I didn't know I would write a companion. I didn't know I'd sort of follow up the story. So really, I didn't know when I finished *The Night Diary*. I hadn't even started *Amil and the After*. And that's part of why there's several years in between the stories but after I finished that story, I felt like I had kind of done what I had set out to do with *The Night Diary,* and the main character is Nisha, and she writes a diary to her mother who's no longer living to sort of talk about what she's experiencing as she has to leave her home during the partition in 1947. And she goes from what is now Pakistan over the new border of India with her family. And so she has a twin brother named Amil. And he plays a big role in *The Night Diary*. And as I started to do more and more school visits after *The Night Diary* had been out for a while, the kids started to ask, you know, are you going to do a sequel, and that's always a really great compliment for an author, you know, if they want to sequel that means they liked it. But they started to say, you know, what, about something in Amils point of view, and I was like, you know, maybe that's a really good idea. And I just thought I missed the characters, I wanted to see how they were rebuilding their lives after the sort of

main crisis happened, and what was the fallout of that. And so that's what I did want to show enemies on the after that it's not over, there's still a lot of fallout, there's still refugees going back and forth. And there's still a lot of tension created by the division of Partition, and the British leaving and all of that. And also, I wanted to explore, you know, what we go through as people when kind of the main crisis is over and we've kind of gotten through or we've survived that crisis, but it's not like everything just goes back to normal and everything's fine. We're left with how we're processing, what has happened, and how we're kind of living in this, whatever new world it is. And I was certainly thinking a lot about the pandemic, because I was writing this probably in the I started in the maybe the first year after the pandemic or the second year and kind of wrote it in those two years. So, I was thinking about how we're sort of left with so much after the beginning crisis of that.

Jennifer Baker
I think that's so important, too, because when we reach the end, right, it is a literal end. But it's also a kind of metaphorical end, right? Because these characters do live on.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah.

Jennifer Baker
And at the same time, what we're left with is what we're left with, and we could come back through our imagination of what we hope or imagine, or how we've kind of interpreted what's been provided to us. And then there's the reality, as you say, that you're still learning and you're growing up in this environment of, particularly for these characters, great division, a lot of confusion, because they're young, right? When they're seeing this, and they're seeing a lot of hypocrisy from the adults in their world, right? Like, we can help but we can help but so much. But we can help these people, but not these people, there's a way to navigate that. And what I really appreciated with *Amil*, is Amil has a lot of questions. It's like I don't get it. I don't get these rules. But me as an adult read again, I'm like, Oh, you will learn you will see that the complexity of this and how to navigate this for your safety, your family safety is not easily explained.

Veera Hiranandani
Umm hm. I mean, I think that I carry both of those feelings in me as an adult, you know, there's still the, the younger, maybe more innocent person inside of me that's like, why are things the way they are? And for so many different issues and reasons. I'm always asking myself that. And then the adult me's like, well, I guess it's because of this, and this, and this, and this, but that sort of questioning and hopeful part of me kind of lives in these younger characters. So they're asking about the division, why did India split into two countries in the first place? And what does that mean for them and their identity, and they also, they come from an interfaith family. So there was a lot of tension between Hindus and Muslims. I mean, during the time of partition, it really escalated as the British were leaving quickly and drew the lines like, right through communities. And as we know, you know, history repeats itself all over the place,

dividing people based on religion, or based on race, or based on whatever group we think maybe there's a certain kind of agenda of separating people to there are certain people that say, Well, this will solve the problem, you know, and everybody will have their own space. But as we know, that's just that never works out. And it never works out in an equitable way. And then just regular people on the ground are like during the Partition just left to sort of figure out how they're going to just live their lives and survive.

And so Amil and Nisha have a Muslim mother who's no longer living and a Hindu father, and a Hindu grandmother and so they're seen as a Hindu family, going in the direction a Hindu family would go in during that time. And the reason I did that was because my family's Hindu. My father had to leave his home during the partition with his parents, my grandparents and his brothers and sisters. And so that was the story that I was most familiar with and could inhabit most easily. But I also wanted Nisha and Amil, to ask this question, you know, "if my identity is sort of connected to both sides, where do I belong and all of this?" But if their mother was still living, it would have been a different kind of story. And one that I wasn't sure if I was prepared to to tell. So that's part of why I did that. And I'm also from an interfaith family. So I understand that kind of multiple identity navigation. My father was born in India and came here and he has a Hindu background. My mother was born here in the New York area and is Jewish, and then my parents met in the late 1960s, which is a whole other story. But…

[10:48]

Jennifer Baker
It's also so intriguing to me how much weight is put on faith as a determining factor, for a method of classification, I should say. And I as a 40-something-year old, I'm still confused by that, as someone who's more agnostic, you know. It's not that I don't understand religion, it's the separation. We supposedly in the United States have the separation of church and state, but that's not real, right? That a lot of ways, and how church, religion, faith, interfaith is so important, and yet it is still used against people. And to have these characters like you say, they are Muslim, and Hindu, and not understanding why these groups are treated so differently, why do we elevate and then demean? Why do we do that? And it's so interesting because it makes me think more about messaging in books. I think, especially for those of us who write or have written for younger readers, that there's always this claim of messaging. And I think that kind of ties that back to the way banning is framed like they're giving the worst messages to our children about XYZ, which is total BS, but it is framed in a story of trying to really just understand. And that's what I really took with me the most is just, there is a story here, but I don't consider there's a message here. I consider their story here to just embrace the experiences that Amil and Nisha are going through, and the ways in which they're also teaching adults through their questions, and also their actions. And so I guess, in a very long winded way here, that is me asking, how do you approach that whether you're cognizant of that's what you're doing or not? Yeah.

Veera Hiranandani

Well, that you just gave me a lot to think about, I think, because I come from an interfaith family and a very secular interfaith family, because I think my parents felt like, well, we're kind of joining our worlds and their families were not supportive of their marriage at first. Eventually, everybody kind of evolved and came around, but it was always an issue. And so their reactions to that was like to kind of put religion somewhere else, you know, but at the same time, it never goes away, you know. And it was always kind of in play in my family, and both sides of my family and the more religious people on different sides of my family, you know the different messages I got of what my identity was. And so as much as they were sort of trying to simplify it, it was still very important. So I kind of bring that to my writing. And I'm bringing it into this space of Partition, where religion was a huge reason of why there was so much conflict, although that wasn't always generated by the just the people on the ground, right? Often these conflicts are generated by political groups and leaders that have their own agendas that are never really about the people on the ground. I'm obviously tying that into some current events, as well as we can kind of see that playing out in the Middle East. But I think that looking at Partition, I just wanted to really explore all of these experiences of people connecting not that they're as Muslims and Hindus, not that, you know, I didn't want to just put out the message like "everybody's just a human being underneath and everything's fine." If we look at that, because it is more complicated than that, we're going to be bringing different things to our relationships, if we have different backgrounds, different bias, different practices, you know, maybe even different ways of seeing the world sometimes, but it's worth it. It's worth it to kind of look under those labels, but it's not… it's not always easy. And we kind of have to respect that journey as well. And so I wanted to show Amil kind of grappling with all of that, you know, he has his father who's very secular and as a doctor, and he's like, we're all the same underneath. You know, we're all just kind of blood and bones and just human beings that way. But he's also just very focused on kind of survival in his own way and doing his job and not really looking at the humanity of his children who are struggling, because he's just trying to take care of them kind of in more of a like, here's a place to live, and here's the money, and I'm doing what I can. And he's stressed out about zone stuff going on at work and trying to keep his head above water. And then they have their grandmother who's Hindu, and who is more religious. And then they have Kazi who is their, he started off as their family cook, but he joins them. I'm kind of spoiling that a little bit with *The Night Diary*, because you're not sure if he's gonna kind of make it and be with them again. But he's Muslim. And he's also more religious. And so I wanted Amil to have kind of these models of adults, sort of doing things in different ways. And he's observing with Nisha, you know, what are the positives and negatives of everything going around me. What the adults around me telling me what I should think? And then what do I think? And so he's, he's really just sorting through that mess. And there are no perfect answers.

Jennifer Baker
There really aren't. There's that practicality that you mentioned when it comes to their father, because he's in medicine, too. So sometimes, I would imagine that there's this necessity to look at things in a very kind of binary way, too. And then having your kids come to you and say, "But why, why why?" May kind of reactivate something that's been lost. And I think about that a little bit too, like you were mentioning the inquisitive nature that you've come to the page with. And I remember hearing Jason

Reynolds say, similarly, he's like, you know, I still feel a little childish. I mean, you didn't say the same thing, obviously. But um, you know, he's like, I still feel childish in a way. And I tap into that in my writing, because it's so important to remember what that was like, so that we don't talk down to the young folks that we're writing for.

Veera Hiranandani
Absolutely. And anytime I'm connected to Jason Reynolds in any way, I will. I'll take it. Yeah. I mean, I try to see the world through my character's eyes. I'm not sort of writing for them. I'm trying to write *through* them in that way. So then I have to be really connected to my inner 12-year-old. I heard on a— I was on a panel recently, and somebody asked the question, "Do you think you have to have kids to write well for kids?" And I was like, No, that has nothing to do with it. I do have kids, and some people do. And some people don't who write for children. I think it has nothing to do with it in the sense that it doesn't mean that I'm not influenced in my role as a parent, or watching my kids and putting some of their characteristics and my characters, but I think it's much more important to be in touch with your own inner child. I think, otherwise, then you are writing down to your kids or their friends and it just creates a different angle. So I agree with with that.

Jennifer Baker
And it makes me wonder if people don't want to revisit when they may not lean towards. I read everything. I've announced this to people all the time. I'm like, I read picture books. I read early readers, I read poetry, I read adult fiction, I read literary fiction, I read all the things, graphic novel, you name it, if it sounds good, I'll read it. I don't care. And that weird kind of bifurcation point where it's like, I don't read for young people, because I'm not young. And I'm just like, there's just so much to be gained to kind of revisit that openness, inquisitiveness, as you've mentioned, childishness as Jason mentioned, innocence, or loss of innocence, and all those things. So, you know, when I read a book like *Amil*, I'm thinking a lot about what can be gained when a person is reading it. And I know that's not necessarily again, going to like the aim is for kids to understand war. And like, that's a big job for anybody. And it's a big job for a cast in a book to kind of carry. But, you also have this range of stories that you've written, where young folks are just finding out things about themselves too. So yeah, like how to find what you're not looking for. And that came in the middle of these two books. So when you go from a book, like *The Night Diary*, and especially when it kind of explodes on the scene like that, and then you go to the next one, and the next one, how's that motivation going there? How are we keeping that momentum?

[19:33]

Veera Hiranandani
Oh, gosh, lots of coffee, I guess. No, I think, I'm on my very personal path of exploration. And I have, I've been lucky enough to write well enough to get published and then have readers join me on that journey. So if you look at all my middle grade books, it's just me exploring different aspects of myself and my family history. Like that's all it is. In some ways, all of the characters are all these just kind of

different versions of me and my family and my kids and my grandparents that I, some of them I knew, and some of them I didn't, or what I thought they might be like. And then of course, it's fiction. So then you just kind of plant those seeds, and then grow these new things out of those seeds. So like my first book, *The Whole Story of Half a Girl*, is very much based on my own experiences growing up in Connecticut. And then *The Night Diary* is about my family's history during the partition. And then *How to Find What You're Not Looking For* was me exploring when my parents got married in the late 1960s, you know, and their families weren't supportive of their marriage and why they, you know, it was important to them to make that choice anyway, even though they could have sort of lost their families in the process. They didn't, but it was at risk. And then also, you know, the main character of *How to Find What You're Not Looking For*, who's a 12-year-old Jewish girl growing up in the 1960s. But I have a Hindu parent and a Jewish parent. So I'm exploring what that experience might have been like. And then with Nisha and Amil, they are interfaith, but in a different way than I am. So I'm just kind of exploring all of these possibilities that are all connected to me and my family. So it all makes a lot of sense to me, but it may. It may not to everybody else this journey.

Jennifer Baker
I think it makes a lot of sense, though. I yeah, I think it's so intriguing to read about. I'm sorry, I've used this word way too much. But I like the word intriguing. There are certain things that I've questioned. And I think when I grew up, I was reading a lot of kind of the troubled worlds. And not just from like, very white spaces. It's not solely that because I live in New York City. And I've always been around other people of color. It was the dramatic nature of it, if that makes sense. Right? Like *Sweet Valley High*, I guess. It's not too dramatic, but it felt dramatic. You know what I mean? They're cheating on each other. My god! Feelings on a ski trip! Can't relate, right? Like no idea what's going on here. And so I clung to something like The Babysitters Club, because it felt muted in a way that felt a bit more realistic, if that makes sense. Yeah. And I think we need both right. Like, I wasn't reading *The Night Diary*, and the *Amil and the After*s of the world, right? I wasn't reading about kids in other countries dealing with like, very our history, like our real real history, I was reading a lot of contemporary stories. And sometimes you're just like, Okay, I just like complications of friendship, give it to me can relate to that and intrigued by that.

Veera Hiranandani
Because that's they're really trying to navigate their social worlds.

Jennifer Baker
Um hm. And to have the multiplicity of that, to have like, the historical and the big things happening and the fantastical things happening, but also having that kind of crux of, but this is something like how do you navigate friendship? How do you navigate crushes? How do you navigate your period, and there's this great new book by someone we both saw at Hudson called *Free Period*. But it's a really cool book about girls wanting to get menstrual items to young people. And I was like, that is amazing.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, absolutely. And that's part of what I am trying to show that even though I'm writing about these twins in 1947-48, pre- and post-Partition India, that sounds sort of more academic or historical, you know, but it's really just this family still worried about all of the things a family worries about, and they're still worried about, am I going to make a friend. I mean, that's what Amil wants to do. He's sort of really wants a new friend, he's kind of tired of being at home all the time. And he just wants to be a regular kid and have a friend and go bike riding and do all of the things that he misses before all of this happens. So it is about steal those very ordinary things. Some books are just maybe focusing on the drama of that and don't have this other layer of historical backdrop or whatever. But I am definitely trying to do both because I want a kid to just enjoy a good story and be engaged, I mean relate to it, no matter who they are and where they're from.

Jennifer Baker
For sure it I feel like people will really, really relate to Amil. And the folks he's interacting with the ways he's talking to his family, the beautiful drawings. I can't not mention those beautiful, beautiful drawings in the book. Can we give a shout out?

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, to Prashant Miranda, who is the illustrator. And I love telling the story. Prashant, who's an amazing person, I met him in I went to a children's lit festival in Bangalore, India, right after, like a year maybe after *The Night Diary* came out. And he was there too. And I was looking at his work and we were just you know, chatting and you knew the way You kind of book festivals meet all kinds of people. And what do you do? You know, what's your story He's based in Canada. And anyway, so I was looking at his work. And I just, it just popped into my head. And then I ended up following him on Instagram and on Instagram, he has all these pictures of his journals, these watercolor travel journals that are just these beautiful sketches with watercolors, and they're just so hopeful. And it just reminded me of what I had imagined Amil's drawings to be, because I didn't show them in *The Night Diary*. But he does draw that in *The Night Diary*. And I was starting to first think about this book. I'm like, if I write this book, I want to show the drawings and I want Prashant to do them. Like I really thought that and it wasn't even a year until like a couple years later that my editor reached out to him to see if he could do them. And then it happened. So it was great. But he doesn't even know that I was thinking that oh, really? Or he was hired to do the illustrations. Yeah. I had a plan.

Jennifer Baker
Love a plan and love when a plan comes together. Yeah, it's really beautiful. Amil is talking to mom as well, through these drawings. So just like Nisha was literally writing letters, Amil, still talking. So you carry that through to for both of them.

Veera Hiranandani

Right. And so this is the way that he would choose to kind of communicate to her, he feels like he wants more of a connection in the way that Nisha was able to kind of create this connection to the mother she never knew. But he doesn't like to write, he has dyslexia. But I don't say it, I don't label it in the book, because he doesn't know that he has dyslexia because of his circumstance in in during the partition in 1948. It's not like he's going to be necessarily have an IEP and be evaluated in that way. And the way kind of modern world is now. And so he's just seen as somebody who has trouble reading has trouble writing and is not focused enough in school or is just not taking things serious enough where it's kind of playing around he, I think he would be diagnosed with some attention issues as well. So he's struggling through that and doesn't understand why these things are hard for him. But drawing is something that really just sets him free. And so Nisha knows that about him, she has this instinctual knowledge, even though she doesn't have the labels or the right kind of words for it. And so she suggests, well, why don't you draw as a way to show our mother what we're experiencing now? And so, that's what you see in the pages.

Jennifer Baker
So how is it going from book to book once this all beautifully came together? And you're going from *Night Diary*, you're beginning to contemplate *Amil*. And you have *How to Find What You're Not Looking For*. And you're also coming off with some other books, like you said, *The Whole Story of Half a Girl* and the Phoebe Green Series. So how, how is it for you now that you're several books into your writing?

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, it's interesting. I think it's like traveling, when you're really lost in the world of your book, you know, you're fully in it, and you're, you're there and you're very present, it's not always easy to get to that place. But once I get to that place, I'm just really immersed, they don't really think about any other book, I can't write multiple books at once. I mean, mean, sometimes I'm like, you know, doing the last revisions on something while I'm writing something else, but I really prefer. And I think that I often, you know, I'm not somebody who can necessarily write a book every year, because I really need that time to kind of fully immerse and then take a little time off afterwards to kind of just get inspired again, go back to some ideas that maybe I was kind of chewing on before. And just every book changes me. So now who am I? What do I care about now? How have my kind of thoughts been changed by writing the book and the world? And then maybe an idea I came up with four years ago seems suddenly like the perfect one for now, or I'm not connected to it anymore. And you know, I need kind of new inspiration. So yeah, I think I've been absolutely changed by every book I write, and then I kind of miss it for a while. And then I get excited, the new idea, and then I traveled to that new idea. And then I'm there.

Jennifer Baker
It's so cool to hear how other people. And some folks are like, I can do multiple books at a time. And some folks are like, I can do one at a time or it just, you know, I have to know the whole thing before I get to the page. I'm a juggler. Yeah, I do multiple things at a time.

Veera Hiranandani
And do you choose to do that? Is that your preference, if you could always kind of control your schedules and your things going on?

Jennifer Baker
I guess? It's really where I lean because like you said, you get excited about certain things, and you just want to focus on that. And then I get stuck. So then I have another thing that I can look at.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah.

Jennifer Baker
When I'm stuck. And that can intrigue me for a bit and I'm working that out. And then I can go back to the other thing, because I always say in my head, it's organized chaos. Because I'm like there's a lot going on, but I know exactly where it's going.

[30:02]

Veera Hiranandani
Good. My office is organized chaos so I can understand, right? Something like life is but you know, in the as we all have many different things going on at once. But yeah with writing I prefer to really just immerse in one thing at a time.

Jennifer Baker
I think it’s also healthy, you know what I mean? Because they you don't have a bunch of half partially done things you're like that's done by we're moving on from that. Damn that thing is still there and it's like two-thirds.

Veera Hiranandani
I mean, it doesn't mean I never get an idea and like, just suddenly write some notes or write a few pages of something but then I know I'm not gonna immerse I know, I'm going to just put it aside and they with because I don't want to lose the momentum. You're saying it's healthy, it's more like I get too anxious and overstimulated if I'm doing too many things at once. So I just need to regulate myself that way, I guess.

Jennifer Baker
More than fair, just give me the thing. I wonder if I could just get one thing done, I'm gonna try that. I think my agent would appreciate it, honestly. If it just was like, I'm gonna finish this thing. It's just like, great. Rather than like, I have two pieces of things. I'd love for you your feedback? How have you

experienced kind of and navigated publishing, especially publishing for young readers? ‘Cause the Phoebe Green Series seems very different from some of the more recent stuff.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, you know, I had that idea for that series when my kids were a lot younger. So it definitely was inspired by like, sort of in that younger kid world. And thinking about food and food culture in this country. And the way I grew up kind of used to trying not only, you know, foods, from my different cultures in my family, but also, we were just kind of my parents liked food, and we tried all kinds of things. And I just happened to be a very sort of experimental eater. So that was like, just something I always like to do. And I eventually learned how to cook. And I just really enjoy food and cooking and eating, eating even more than cooking. And so it's just kind of I wanted to celebrate that I felt like I was reading and seeing books for young kids that were more about like, you know, the sort of picky eater, yucky green food kind of you sort of navigating past that obstacle. I'm like, Yeah, but for some kids, it's like no foods great, really fun. And I like broccoli. And I like lots of other things, too. So I was writing for that kid. And also just wanted to be funny and just play, you know, so it was just a very playful chapter book series. And I always like to challenge myself with new forms. But after that, then I started thinking about *The Night Diary*, which is so much more serious and heavy, but I didn't know if I could write it. I don't know if I could take on that subject matter. So yeah, and then, you know, I thought about it for a few years before I even attempted, and then I did. And now I think that tends to be more even if my writing isn't heavy, I kind of need a sort of a weightier reason to enter the project somehow. But I don't know, I might try a funny chapter book series again, at some point, you never know.

Jennifer Baker
Well, you have a picture book coming out next year, the week of my birthday.

Veera Hiranandani
Happy early birthday.

Jennifer Baker
Thank you, Aquarius! It's called *Many Things at Once.*

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, well, so I have two picture books coming out to

Jennifer Baker
Two?

Veera Hiranandani
Yes, one in the fall of 2024 in September, and that's called *The Greatest*. And then I have in the spring of 2025. I have *Many Things at Once,* which surprise, surprise are based on my own background, and

inspired by family members in a picture book version. I was really excited. I just had always dreamed of writing a picture book. And I think a lot of times when people think of entering the children's writing space, I think people if they don't know about the entire, you know, market and the way things work, they think about picture books, right? The kids read these beautiful illustrated books. So that was kind of my first entry point into children's literature many, many years ago, even though of course, I read like middle grade and YA growing up. But I didn't really think of it that way. I was just reading the younger chapter books. And then I eventually read, grown up chapter books. So that was really exciting. But the greatest is inspired by my grandfather on my mother's side. And he was this sort of larger than life character who was really creative and really fun. And my cousins and I, we would go and visit my grandparents, both of them, but he would just make up all these things and games and he just had this like magical sense about him. And so we just thought he was the greatest grandfather in the world. But I sort of tell it from a grandparent's point of view that he doesn't quite understand why as his grandchildren think he's so good. He, I mean, he has the greatest grandchildren that have ever been, but he's just an ordinary man. And so it's kind of the way you know, love and these connections can make people really special to each other.

Jennifer Baker
Aw, I love that. That's really sweet. And *Many Things at Once* is illustrated by Nadia Alam.

Veera Hiranandani
Right, right. And so that book is talking about a young girl who's navigating the same identity that I have. And you know, she's really asking the question, I love these different sides of my family and different identities. But it's not always easy. Sometimes I feel not enough of one thing or the other. Or sometimes I feel sort of separate from other people who maybe don't have as many questions or aren't trying to navigate multiple things. And so I wanted to kind of show that you can love things about yourself, but they can also be difficult to times or confusing at times. And it is many things at once, as the title says, so I wanted to kind of give kids that window into, yeah, you know, sometimes it is tricky, or it feels complicated, and that's okay. I mean, it's not just about celebrating everything.

Jennifer Baker
No, but if they're gifts and snacks, it's helpful. We love snacks.

Veera Hiranandani
Absolutely.

Jennifer Baker
That doesn't end kids.

Veera Hiranandani
And I should also mention that the greatest is illustrated by Vesper Stamper.

Jennifer Baker
Yeah, the cover isn't available for the one coming in January. But the cover for the greatest is gorgeous.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah. So, so lucky to have both of them Nadia, and Vesper, it's amazing. It's really incredible to watch the story come alive.

Jennifer Baker
The stories I hear about the picture book process, I know it can be a long one, depending but when it comes together, it's just gorgeous. I can only imagine the emotions that come up when you see the illustrations for the first time.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, I was really emotional. You know, I never, either that's exactly what I thought in my mind, or I never knew it could look like this. And both things are just you sort of get filled with this childlike wonder.

Jennifer Baker
The Greatest comes out September 3rd. And then, *Many Things at Once* is January 28 [2025]. So y'all can get caught up Veera's library all I'm saying. If you're just starting out, you have good start with these beautiful picture books covered out. And then gradually as the kids age.

Veera Hiranandani
Their whole young lives and I'm working on a YA so we'll see.

Jennifer Baker
Get out. Welcome. We'll see. We'll see what happens. All right. You can curse in those.

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, so I've graduated. Finally.

Jennifer Baker
You can do all kinds of things away.

Veera Hiranandani
Very freeing, it can be very freeing. Okay.

Jennifer Baker
I think I don't know, maybe not? Maybe not everyone think that'd be like, nope, too dark?

Veera Hiranandani
Yeah, I'm sure I'm I need to educate myself on like, where those limits are right within YA.

Jennifer Baker
I feel like that depends on your editor. Exactly. Oh, Veera this has been such a pleasant conversation.

Veera Hiranandani
I'm so glad to have this kind of conversation with you. I feel like I've been like waiting. Somehow. I knew we would. At some point.

Jennifer Baker
It was all a matter of time. Yes. And then the 10th anniversary year, it seems perfect for us finally have that conversation to have it around such a wonderful book. And it being a companion to something that started such a great conversation and looked at very different ways. Like you mentioned in your author's note for *Amil* specifically, like how do we process trauma? How do we heal from it. And I think it's great to have these two books side by side to really keep that consideration going. And not just kind of ended with Nisha, and know that this family continues.

Veera Hiranandani
Continues to, you know, grapple with the hard things and also find their joy again.

Jennifer Baker
Yeah, yeah, it'll leave the kiddos and every reader I think would hope.

Veera Hiranandani
That's what I try to do. Because I try to stay hopeful myself. So.

Jennifer Baker
Good times are well too so I think you were successful.

Veera Hiranandani
Thank you.

Jennifer Baker 39:30
So Veera, how can we reach out to you follow up make sure we're on the ball with the upcoming picture books how can people connect with you see where you're going reach out to you for school visits. I know the school year is ending or ended by the time this episode airs but you are available.

Veera Hiranandani

I am available for next year. Absolutely. And you can find me at www Veerahiranandani.com On my website and I have a little tab there to con tacked me and then I have information on my booking agent that helps me arrange school visits. So her information is on there booked authors and then I'm on Instagram at viewer rights and I'm on x, as they say formally Twitter at @VeraHira. So that's where you can find me and all my news.

Jennifer Baker
And it's Veera Hiranandani, V-E-E-R-A-H-I-R-A-N-A-N-D-A-N-I dot com. Yes, I'm gonna have to preorder *The Greatest* one because it's just too cute.

[40:33]
Veera Hiranandani
Oh, thank you.

Jennifer Baker
I have a lot of friends with kids. So that is very helpful. It's very helpful, because then I could spend money on yours books. Give them to their children.

Veera Hiranandani
I would be honored, I would be honored.

Jennifer Baker
Oh, of course. Just keep keep them coming. Keep them coming. So Veera, thank you so much again, for *Amil and the After,* for all your beautiful wonderful books for the ones to come for the ones we have ever just taking time to talk to me. I really I never take it for granted that yells just take time to have a conversation. And I really appreciate it.

Veera Hiranandani
Well, I appreciate being on here and being in your space and getting to talk about writing and books my favorite thing to talk about.

Jennifer Baker
And thank you all for listening. I want to say that this episode, as well as many from the anniversary year are sponsored by Writeability, a nonprofit Writers Guild in defense of the imagination. Thanks again for listening to the minorities in publishing podcast. As a reminder you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com, or on Instagram and Twitter, at minoritiesinpub. And you can sign up for the monthly newsletter. Also feel free to rate the podcast on your listening platform. Take care.

[Music fades out]

[42:02]