



April 1-15

Hello Friends,

From a young age, my father taught me to love books. But he also taught me the somewhat-questionable habit of eating while reading. I'm sure librarians everywhere are shuddering at the thought of pages stuck together with jam. This habit annoyed my long-suffering mother to no end. She was always nagging my father and I to put our books down at the breakfast table, while we sat hunched over them: our mouths munching on toast, our minds lost in the pages. This was my bliss. Books have always been like food to me, both nurturing and a source of delight. As a child, I greedily devoured books and, so the library was my version of a candy store.

While I've always loved reading, writing was only a remote dream. My career took a different path through literature, but it was as an English teacher that I finally came upon a chance to write a story I felt needed to be shared.

The story that follows is not my own. It comes from my former ESL student, a young Syrian refugee who wanted to be seen and understood. It comes from his family's valiant love and quiet bravery. This book comes from Abu Bakr al Rabeeah's secret wish: a wish to share his story.

I wrote *Homes* in order to honour a life beautifully-lived despite the casual horrors of growing up in a war zone. Based on my interviews with Abu Bakr and his family, this book chronicles the strange twists of fate that led them from the dangerous streets of Iraq, to the sudden violence of the Syrian conflict, to Canada, where they ultimately found safety. Abu Bakr shares his life with you, not because he wants to highlight the violence, but because he feels like it can "move people to love each other" more.

I am incredibly humbled that my debut book, *Homes: A Refugee Story*, has been selected as OverDrive's next Big Library Read. It brings such joy to Abu Bakr and I that his wish of wanting to tell the world of Syria's plight is being fulfilled in such a far-reaching way. For this is the magic of books: they don't just feed our imaginations, they build bridges of understanding. The relationship of sharing, receiving and honouring each other is the true gift of storytelling—something I am so grateful to be a partner in. I hope that reading this book feeds your soul the way it did mine in writing it.

Bon appetit and happy reading,

Winnie Yeung

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