

five minutes with Hajera Memon

Managing Director – Shade 7 Publishing

Award-winning Hajera Memon has captured the imagination of children all over the world with Qur'anic pop-up storybooks. Interviewed by Heba Hashem



Why did you start your business?

I started my publishing business after deciding to resign as a finance lawyer. I wanted to pursue a career where I could learn more about my faith and make it accessible and enjoyable for others. I loved the childhood stories I grew up with, and the combination of writing and novelty publishing fast became a way for me to rediscover and share these miraculous adventures and timeless lessons.

How did you identify your niche?

I wanted to create something unique, memorable, and of exceptional quality: something that encapsulated the miracles of the stories in an awe-inspiring way. Nothing like this really existed on the Islamic publishing scene.

Your first book, *The Story of the Elephant*, achieved phenomenal success. What do you think impressed readers?

I think the quality and creativity of the book really brought the story to life.

The pop-up bird page, pop-up Ka'ba, and colouring press-out activity set have proven to be favourites with children. *The Story of the Elephant (Surah Al-Feel)* was one of my childhood favourites,



so I knew which elements I wanted to bring to life; for example, the tab in the story where the elephant actually kneels in front of the Ka'ba.

Can you tell us more about crowdfunding?

Pop-up books are hand-assembled, so production costs are fairly high. We started our publishing journey through the crowdfunding platform called Indiegogo. People from all over the world backed the initiative by pre-ordering the book, which helped us raise a total of £41,472. It's now available on Amazon, as well as in Harrods and Selfridges in London!

You also plan to publish 30 additional titles?

The Qur'an is rich with magnificent, timeless stories, and hence our schedule was easy to fill with titles. Some of our next stories include Noah's Ark, the story of Prophet Joseph, and a series on Prophet Moses. For 2015, we hope to release various novelty books, including a special bath book, in Arabic, Danish, and French.

What about the digital apps?

The idea for the app is to keep it interactive. It will be 3D modelled with features where you can tap the elephant and he'll kneel down. Parents can also record their own voice over the story, which is ideal for those who work late and don't get to share that special story time with their children.

Which essential item do you always pack when you travel?

I have a real sweet tooth and always miss chocolate when I'm abroad, so it would have to be that!

Where will you go next?

I'd love to go to Makkah in Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage (for Umrah and Hajj). The Ka'ba pop-up page in our book is my absolute favourite, and seeing it in real life would be a dream come true.

What are you currently reading and listening to?

I'm currently reading *King of the Castle, Choice and Responsibility in the Modern World*, by Gai Eaton. It was a gift from a friend and recommended by others close to me. I'm listening to *Jewels of The Qur'an – Inspirations From Those Nearest to Allah*, by Ustadha Yasmin Mogahed. The lecture is a strong reminder to look deeper into the signs, lessons, and miracles of the stories.

Charity work is an integral part of your agenda. Which one do you support at the moment?

We donate our books as Eid gifts to READ Foundation in Pakistan, it specialises in education for children. We're also excited to be supporting Islamic Relief with a joint campaign starting in May throughout Ramadan 2015.

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