

Beat: Entertainment

Al-Tahan: It is a smarter childhood that motivated to write books for Children

The book launch Event of Abssy & Fattoom

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USPA NEWS - During the book launch Event of Abssy & Fattoom Series 2, in Alfurat Arabic School in Sutton, we had an interview with the author and producer of this book series, Zena Al-Tahhan.

Q/ Who is Zena Al-Tahhan?

I am originally from Iraq. I live in UK. I have B.A. (Hons) degree in Interpreting and Translation from College of Arts. I am registered with Chartered Institute of Linguists, and National Register for Public Service of Interpreters. I inherited my language skills from my mother's side, where appreciation of language and quest for learning were dominant. I started writing short stories since I was seven. This hobby evolved into writing novels when I was a teenager.

All jobs I took following my University degree were revolving around language and practical usages of learning a language. Training in this field is, in fact, on-going.. I currently lead a team of Interpreters in a Neurological Rehabilitation Unit in Bagshot, UK.

Q/ What prompted you to write?

Lack of suitable engaging reading resources for Arab children living in the west was what mainly prompted me to write and produce these books, in addition to raising awareness among Arabic parents to spend more time reading with their children in Arabic.

The current story books and text books available in UK still need to address the special language needs of children learning Arabic as a second language. The language used in my books is simplified Arabic with vocabulary used by all Arabic dialects.

Q/ Did you publish other books apart from Abssy & Fattoom Series 2?

I published 7 picture books in Arabic for younger readers; Series 1 Abssy & Fattoom story books, suitable for ages 3-6 years old.

Q/ Abssy is a famous character known by many people in Adnan wa Leena animated TV show. We saw Abssy in your books, so who is Fattoom? And what's the reason behind this choice?

This is a good question. All series characters remain unchanged throughout the series. There will be some additional characters but no changes to the primary ones in all books. It is worth mentioning Abssy is not the character from the TV animation show, Adnan wa Leena. Choice of names of Series' characters was based on the following: a) amiable and meaningless: We conducted a questionnaire among children to choose from normal Arabic names versus funny and meaningless, second option won most votes. B) easy to pronounce letter sounds: we tried to avoid Arabic letter sounds that are pronounced differently in some Arabic countries such as "Ø¶ , Ø , Ø« , Ø-“[?], to ensure correct pronunciation from a very young age.

Q/ Any previous participations in book expos?

I did not participate in any book expos for family circumstances. I would love to participate in books exhibitions, though and meet with other writers. However, I participated in cultural festivals in the British capital where cultural publications, clothing, hand crafts and fine arts from Iraq. My participations mostly exhibited Abssy & Fattoom series 1.

Q/ All themes in your books were inspired from children daily life, were there any stories that are purely fictional?

Yes, some books were based on real events while others are fictional. However next series will feature some fantasy mixed with some scientific, geographic and biological facts. We want the information to flow to the children in an engaging way.

Q/ Are your books published in United Kingdom Only? Are they sold in other countries?

Abssy & Fattoom books are currently published in the UK and Lebanon. There are currently on- going talks to publish Assy & Fattoom in USA for Arabic schools.

We are hoping to see our books published and read in all Arab countries.

Q/ Any possibilities for translating the books?

This was brought up by some British schools. However I am not looking into this, the reason behind writing these books originally was to provide some suitable and fun reading material in Arabic for our children due to market shortage. Book stores are currently

saturated with English picture books.

Q/ What are Zena Al-Tahhan's ambitions?

I would love to see Arabic schools allocate some time during school time for reading picture books and open in-class discussions, to practice what children learned during Arabic lessons. I would also wish that Arabic families spend more time in reading in Arabic with their children. I sincerely believe that those children are our investment, if they are well educated about our culture and language, they just may go back to our home land and help rebuild it.

We also had a chat with Betul Salma, series illustrator, a product designer.

Q/ who is Betul Salma?

I am originally from Iraq. I currently live in UK. I graduated from Middle Essex University/ Product Design.

Q/ When did you start painting?

I started painting since high school. I fine-tuned my art in a way that I had this ambition of carrying this talent to my future university study, and this is why I chose Product Design for my University study since it is quite relevant to my ambition and ties talent with career.

Q/ Any previous participations or production?

I have recently graduated from Uni, and still looking for the job that is suitable for my degree and talent, that is why I have not participated in any art exhibitions. I am hoping to participate in the future, though, to get the exposure and recognition.

I won an award in New Designers Expo in Middle Essex University, my award winning design was my graduation project.

I am very proud that my illustrations in Absy & Fattoom Series, by Zena Al-Tahhan, were received quite well. I am hoping this project will grant me a special place in the World of Art and Design.

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