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Hello, Friends!

It's Time to Meet a Real-Life Hero

So, wow. What a strange couple of months it's been! On any given day I've been devastated, angry, inspired, grateful, frightened, lethargic... my heart is with everyone as we move through this COVID-19 crisis. ... to add insult to injury (as my late father would say!), we have spent the past two nights without power, thanks to the Easter storms in our area. You may have heard our hallelujahs a short while ago when our electricity was restored. :)

Indeed, there's so much we don't know, can't know about what the next hours, days, years will look like. Yet as the world changes, so must we. Whatever is happening, it's important to celebrate the good, the beautiful, the inspiring -- which is exactly why I first fell in love with the story that became the book that's releasing today.

Please allow me to introduce Mohammed Alaa Aljaleel a.k.a. The Cat Man of Aleppo, the hero of this new book [Karim Shamsi-Basha](#) and I co-wrote with amazing art by [Yuko Shimizu](#), brought to us by [G.P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Random House](#).

You may have heard of Alaa on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#). He's a pretty amazing guy who, when all his neighbors were fleeing Aleppo due to the war, stayed to create a shelter for the left-behind cats. The sanctuary still exists, though it has moved several times after bombings. His story will fill your heart with love and hope! And one of my most favorite things about the book is the introductory note from Alaa that's printed in both English and Arabic. Beautiful!

Reviews

"The message of resilience and generosity will resonate with all ages." - [New York Post](#)

★ "A safe, sobering, and hopeful introduction to the crisis in Syria." - [Booklist](#)

"Alaa's story is one of faith in humanity, the power of compassion and the benefits of altruism. At the book's conclusion, readers are sure to be eager to help, their own hearts bursting with happiness, making Alaa's love multiply even further still." - [Shelf Awareness](#)

★ "This story could work effectively as a readalone or a readaloud, and it feels as

much like folklore as narrative nonfiction." - *BCCB*

"This gentle book emphasizes that in the midst of chaos, caring for the forgotten and discarded, no matter how small, affirms the preciousness of all life." - *The Horn Book*

★ "A beautifully told and illustrated story that offers a unique perspective on both war and humanity." - *Kirkus*

"The power of one person's kindness and commitment to others is a potent message." - *School Library Journal*

★ Latham and Shamsi-Basha pick out the glimmers of light that make up Alaa's story, and Shimizu portrays their beauty. - *Publisher's Weekly*

Celebrate with me on Twitter!

Today I invite you to help celebrate the release of this book by sharing **a favorite cat pic** and using the **hashtag #CatManofAleppo**. You can also tag any or all of the following: @irene_latham @arabinalabama @yukoart @penguinkids @theAleppoCatMan. And if you're not on Twitter, just send your pic in reply to this email. **At noon Sunday April 19 Maggie (our cat) will select 3 winners to receive a FREE copy of the book!**

You can also celebrate by making a donation to [Ernesto's Sanctuary for Syrian Cats](#). Hundreds of cats (and other critters) will thank you!

Yes! I Want to Meet the CAT MAN OF ALEPPO!

Happy National Poetry Month!

I love April. This year I expanded my [NPM ARTSPEAK! poem-a-day project](#) across the calendar year. You can read all the poems inspired by "red" art [here](#). The latest ones have been in direct response to COVID-19:

"[In the Midst of It All](#)" after *Red Hills, Lake George, 1927* by Georgia O'Keeffe

"[Listen to the Windmill](#)" after *Fields of Red Tulips with Rijnsburg Windmill 1886* by Claude Monet

Read about mine and others' experience with life-changing poetry in this article: [10 Poets Share the Poem that Changed Their Lives](#)

Find out about what poets and others in the kidlit community are offering during National Poetry Month by visiting the Roundup at [Jama's Alphabet Soup](#).

And this year (thanks to COVID-19) I got a surprise: [NINE: A Book of Nonet Poems](#), originally scheduled to release June 9, has come early... just in time for National Poetry Month!

It was pure joy working with Karen Boss and the whole team at [Charlesbridge...](#) and [Amy Huntington](#) is a wonder. I hope you will enjoy this sneak peek video of me reading "[Beethoven's Ninth](#)" from the book, and here of me and Lady Godiva (my cello) [performing "Ode to Joy"](#) from my studio in Blount County, Alabama.

Special Opportunity

I am looking for 9 special people to be my #9 Street Team to help me get the word out about *NINE: A Book of Nonet Poems*. In order to be considered, please respond to this email with:

1. a
memory
you
have
of
being
age
9
OR
a
nonet
you've
written
(or
one
you
admire)
OR
an
original
story/poem
related
to
the
number
9.
2. your
mailing
address

The first 9 people to respond will received a FREE finished copy of the book!

Until we meet again...

With so many cancellations, and still so much uncertainty we just don't know when we'll be able to gather again in person. In the meantime, here's a video I made for [nErDcampGA](#) about [Why I Love \(and am missing!\) School Visits...](#)

... and one thing I'm doing a lot of lately (and hope you are too!) is **READING**. Aren't books the best comfort and escape? Thank **YOU** so much for sharing this space with me here today. I wish you health and happiness (and good books!) today and always.

**Love,
Irene**

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