

Muddy People: A Muslim Coming of Age

Sara El Sayed

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Sara El Sayed's heartwarming, humorous memoir *Muddy People* concerns her life growing up in an Egyptian Muslim family in Australia.

El Sayed's childhood was both messy and marked by feelings of being "other." When she was a child, her mother, father, older brother, younger sister, and maternal grandmother moved from Egypt to Australia. They were one of few families of color in their neighborhood and at school, which made El Sayed feel isolated. She faced casual racism and sexism against Muslim women, and she learned to trust few people.

The book moves between reflective stories about El Sayed's mother, her father, and the rules of their household. The chapters about her parents are often written from the vantage of El Sayed's adulthood, noting her and her parents' disparate ways of parenting; she muses on her parents' divorce when she was a teenager, too. Her father is serious about his religion, while her mother refuses to wear hijab.

The chapters concerned with rules from her childhood reflect more on family mandates—no bikinis, no boys, no pets, no life insurance, and no shoes in the house among them. But topics from outside of the family confines also play in, as with memories of a close friend giving a speech at school about why Muslims shouldn't be allowed in the country. El Sayed struggled in these various spaces—and also struggled to reconcile herself to the double standards she faced. Her brother was allowed to date and stay out late; she was told to marry a Muslim man, but did not.

About growing up as an outsider and reckoning with privilege, *Muddy People* is a touching memoir by a woman who made a life of her own while still reflecting on her family's wishes.

ASHLEY HOLSTROM (July / August 2022)

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