

## **Interview with a refugee help organisation**

*How did you come up with the idea to write *My year in a tent*?*

I saw a movie on the children news program about a Belgian girl who have already spent a year in a tent in the backyard. 'My year in a tent', what a cool book title, I thought, but then what? I needed a good plot and it took quite a while before I finally came up with an idea. That happened when I saw a picture of two young brothers in a refugee camp. The eldest held a flip-lop in his hand as if it were a mobile phone with which he made a selfie. That's it, I thought, my main character will be a girl who is going to sleep in a tent to collect money for children in refugee camps! I added to the plot that the girl suffers from anxiety and lives in a remote place, which gave the book a wonderful extra storyline. Two birds with one stone: raising money for children in refugee camps and trying to conquer her own fears.

*Why did you want to use this story to raise awareness of the current situation faced by refugees?*

I think it's very important that children that grow up in a safe country like Holland are fully aware of the fact that this is not the case for every child. That many children grow up in very different circumstances and that you may count your blessings if you're living in a place where your life isn't in constant danger. Other than that I want to raise awareness of the fact that also as an individual you can make a difference. Even if it's on a small scale. Every bit counts

*What are your hopes for this book?*

I hope the book will get to reach a large audience, not only children but also adults who live or work with children. The refugee crisis is an important topic in this book, but it is also about conquering your fears, perseverance, tolerance, compassion and how you can help other people without losing sight of yourself. I deal with pretty tough topics, but my down-to-earth writing tone of voice makes it a light and hopeful book. Master Sinan, in a way inspired from journalist Sinan Can, is in my opinion also a key character. Through his vivid storytelling, he gives children the chance to reflect upon themselves and the world they live in.