



No Ordinary Day

Written by Deborah Ellis

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Valli is a free-spirited child who lives in the coal town of Jharia, India. Her days are filled with picking up stray pieces of coal to make money for food. Her only concerns are the “monsters” that live on the other side of the train tracks—the lepers. Upon finding that the family she lives with is not her real family, Valli decides to leave Jharia, India, by hiding in the back of a coal truck marking the beginning of her journey. When the driver of the truck finds a stowaway on board his truck, he takes her to a woman’s home for stray children. The woman realizes that Valli has leprosy and sends her to the streets where Valli

sleeps on sidewalks and in doorways, begging for food and money.

Valli’s perseverance and positive attitude help her survive as she realizes that she does not need much. She takes what she needs and gives what she has left over to others that need it more. While traveling around the city she notices that her bare feet have cuts and open wounds, but she feels no pain. She calls them her “magic feet.” Later, Valli encounters Dr. Indra, who finds out that Valli’s magical feet are a result of leprosy. Afraid to stay in the hospital with others like her and unable to face her greatest fear, she heads back to the streets, until she finally finds the courage to face her disease and ask for help.

Ellis was born and raised in Canada where she was an avid reader with a rich fantasy life. She has spent much of her life as an activist working in many different countries for educational rights. Ellis believes that certain causes are worth fighting for. One important cause is shown in *No Ordinary Day*, when Ellis explains leprosy and how this disease can be overcome and not feared. Her passion for those suffering with leprosy is reflected in her donation of all the proceeds from this book to the Leprosy Mission. Due to her time in Kolkata, India, she approaches this book with the perspective of having visited the Leprosy Mission Hospital visiting wards, touring villages and meeting many different people to learn about their journeys.

The authenticity of this story is easy to assess as even today local villagers and their families scavenge coal from a coal mine in Jharia, India to earn a few dollars a day. Also, leprosy continues to be a problem in India as there are over 130,000 cases detected yearly. Those diagnosed with leprosy are shunned and sent away from their families. Both of these events are authentic representations discussed throughout the book and occurring in India currently.

This book serves as a great teaching tool for middle school students, demonstrating

different lifestyles and cultures of those living in other countries and difficulties they face. Additionally, creating book study groups or teacher guided discussions on homelessness, abuse, leprosy and courage would deepen the lessons learned from this novel as Ellis brings awareness to the forefront and, hopefully, promotes action among its readers.

Deborah Ellis has written twenty books which have been translated into over 25 languages and has won numerous awards. Many of the royalties from her books are donated to social causes. For example, from her Breadwinner Series alone she has donated over \$1 million dollars. Also, royalties from *My Name Is Parvana* (2012) go to an account managed by Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan which helps women and children by building schools, educating children and helping women find work. Her passion, perseverance and desire to help those less fortunate is what keeps Ellis motivated as she travels and continues to write.

No Ordinary Day might be paired with *In the Shadow of the Pali: A Story of the Hawaiian Leper Colony* by Lisa Cindrich (2002). In this action packed story twelve-year-old Liliha is sent to the Kalaupapa Leprosy Colony at Molokai, Hawaii, where she struggles to endure savage living conditions and people as well as her own disease. Like Valli, Liliha is all alone and has to fight to survive and endure the pain of leprosy. Both are stories of hope, love and survival.

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