

My Name was Hussein

This is an excerpt from My Name Was Hussein, a picture book written by Hristo Kyuchukov and published in 2004.

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Tier 2 terms

gypsies, delicious, observe, ordered, wondered, tore

Web Version: <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/texts/my-name-was-hussein>



This article contains a multimedia feature that is available at the web address above.

My name was Hussein.

I was born in this village.

I belong to a Roma family.

Some call us Gypsies,

but we are the Roma people.

Our people came to Bulgaria many years ago from a place called India.

In our family, we are Muslims.

That is our religion.

We celebrate many holidays.

For every holiday, my mother cooks beautiful foods for us to eat.

Our house smells delicious.

I love the smells.

During holidays, our friends and relatives visit us.

We observe Ramadan.

For a month, my parents do not eat during the day.

During this time, they pray extra prayers.

At night, we eat a special meal called iftar.

The last day of Ramadan is the best.

My father goes to the mosque.

When he comes back,

he gives us candies. My little brother and I kiss our parents' hands to say thank you.

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We also visit my grandparents on holidays.

I love my grandparents.

They are happy when they see me.

They hug me and hold me on their laps.

They give me candies that smell nice, like roses.

My grandmother cooks puddings made of rice and nuts.

She knows exactly what I like to eat.

Before each holiday, my mother and grandmother paint their hands.

They put henna color on their palms and fingers.

They wear special clothes.

This is to show that the holiday has started.

My father buys new shirts for me and my little brother.

He buys new pants and shoes for us.

We have good clothes for the holidays .

I love my name Hussein.

In Arabic, it means handsome.

My grandfather was named Hussein.

His grandfather was also named Hussein.

I am proud of my name.

Even so, everyone in my family calls me Hughsy.

It is their special name for me.

I live in the middle of a loving family.

I have many aunts and uncles and cousins.

We enjoy happy times together.

Then one day everything changed.

The army came with tanks, cannons, guns, and dogs.

No one was allowed to leave the village.

We could not visit our relatives.

We could not go outside at night.

We could not speak our Romani language in the streets.

It was Ramadan.

I wanted to visit my grandparents.

I wanted to taste my grandmother's puddings.

My mother would not let me go.

She was afraid of the soldiers.

On the first day of Ramadan,

the men go to the mosque.

I went with my father,

but the mosque was closed.

The soldiers did not let us inside to pray.

They stood in front of the doors.

We had to go back home.

My father could not buy us

new shirts for Ramadan.

He was not allowed to go to the shops.

My little brother was crying.

He wanted a new shirt.

He wanted to see our grandparents.

I did, too.

My father sat in a chair by the window.

He did not speak to me.

He would not play with me.

I did not understand why.

Then soldiers came to our house.

They had guns. They had dogs.

I was so scared. They ordered us to report to the mayor's office.

Why? I wondered. What did we do?

We did as we were told.

A policeman in the office tore my parents' identity cards into little pieces.

"You must change your names," he said.

"You must choose Christian names. Come back with new names

and you will get new identity cards."

My father's name was Selim.

He did not want another name.

My mother's name was Sanie.

She did not want another name.

My brother's name was Hassan.

He did not want another name.

And I did not want another name.

On my way home, my father said,

"I am not a Christian. I do not want a Christian name."

My mother said, "We have no choice.

We need our identity cards."

Now I have a new identity card, too.

It says my name is Harry.

At school, my teachers call me Harry.

On the streets, my parents call me Harry.

But at home, my parents still call me Hughsy.

What would you call me?

My name was Hussein.

Source

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TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

1. Question

Hussein practices Islam. In the story, Hussein describes an important holiday in his religion, Ramadan, and what his family does to observe or recognize it. Explain what they do.

2. Question

How do you think Hussein feels during Ramadan? How do you know?

3. Question

Compare how Hussein feels about the names Hussein and Harry.

4. Question

Why did Hussein and his family have to change their names?

TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Question

Hussein practices Islam. In the story, Hussein describes an important holiday in his religion, Ramadan, and what his family does to observe or recognize it. Explain what they do.

Answer

Friends and relatives visit, his parents do not eat during the day and say extra prayers, his family eats a special meal at night, his father brings candy when he comes home from the mosque, they visit their grandparents who cook special foods, they wear new clothing and Hussein's mother and grandmother paint their hands and wear special clothes.

2. Question

How do you think Hussein feels during Ramadan? How do you know?

Answer

He feels very happy. He talks about the special meal they eat, how he loves to see his grandparents, how his grandmother knows exactly what he likes to eat and how the candies smell like roses.

3. Question

Compare how Hussein feels about the names Hussein and Harry.

Answer

It doesn't seem as though he feels like the name Harry is his. He doesn't say his name is Harry. He simply says the identity card says his name is Harry. This is very different from the way he described the name Hussein. He seemed very happy and connected to the name Hussein.

4. Question

Why did Hussein and his family have to change their names?

Answer

Soldiers came to their town and made all kinds of changes: They could not leave the village, go outside at night, visit relatives, speak their language in the streets, go to the mosque or even shop. They had to choose Christian names. People did not like that they were Muslim.