

# WRITING\_\_WA.

# LOVE TO

---

# READ LOCAL

---

***Finding My Place: From Cairo to Canberra – the irresistible story of an irrepressible woman, Anne Aly (ABC Books)***

## **Summary**

Anne Aly's autobiography charts her remarkable life, one packed with incident and achievement. Aly has a life-long interest in ordinary people's stories and is a great story teller. Told with an energy and pace that match Aly's own, hers is a fascinating narrative. While her story has many familiar elements, it is Aly's commitment to justice in its broadest sense, her natural curiosity, and her frankness about her own character and life that make this narrative stand out.

As Aly becomes a professor working in research on counterterrorism she also becomes a more overt target for racial vilification, which intensifies after her election to Federal Parliament. While she deals with this, as she does with many other difficult areas of her life, with tolerance and even humour, Aly is also absolutely outspoken in exposing and condemning any form of racial intolerance.

---

## **About the author**

From her birth in Egypt in 1967 to her election to the WA seat of Curtin as a Labor member of the Federal Parliament in 2016, Anne Aly's life has been a turbulent one. Born Azza Mahmoud Fawi Hosseini Ali el Serougi, Aly was two when her family – father, mother and older sister – emigrated to Australia.

She attended primary schools in Sydney and Brisbane, secondary schools in Sydney, and after returning to Egypt with her mother for several years came back to Australia with her first husband and settled in Perth.

Aly has an undergraduate degree with a major in English Literature from the American University in Cairo, a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Language Studies) from Edith Cowan University followed by a Master of Education then a PhD focusing on media and cultural responses to terrorism, both from ECU. She taught English as a second language for many years to support herself as a student then as a single mother. She then worked as a policy officer in education and multicultural affairs in the WA Government. She is an inaugural member of the WA Women's Hall of Fame. Aly is also the author of *Terrorism and Global Security: Historical and Contemporary Approaches*; recently she founded an organisation called People Against Violent Extremism.

---

## Questions for discussion

- Aly often wonders what she is doing in situations that turn out differently to the way she expected. Chart some of these moments in the book and discuss her ways of dealing with them. What sort of insight into her character do these incidents give?
- Many times, Aly puts her life into perspective by commenting on contemporary historical events. An example is where she realises she is 'a child of the Naksa'. Identify such moments. Do they shape her life in any way? How effective is this narrative device in giving Aly's life a broader significance?
- Questions of identity preoccupy Aly, who often thinks of herself as living between two very different cultures, caught between two sets of expectations. How does she describe and manage these cultural and familial differences? Can you read this autobiography as a search for identity?
- At several times in her life, Aly writes, she has to stop and ask herself, "How the felafel did I get here?" (p 9). Talk about the role this kind of humour plays in this narrative and in Aly's life. This remark suggests that that life has been structured through random events. Do you think this is true?
- Aly's determination to achieve and excel in her education is signalled when she is only four, and she and her mother accompany her sister Rhonda to her first day at the local primary school. Anne refuses to leave, and thus begins her schooling at this early age. Discuss the place learning plays in her life and her attitudes towards it.
- Race and class are important determinants in Aly's life experience, both in Australia and Egypt. Discuss their function in her narrative and life.

- As a Muslim woman, Aly decides that Western feminism has nothing to offer her. How revealing is her discussion of Western feminism in relation to Muslim women? In relation to the life choices she makes?

### **If you liked this book, you may also like...**

- *Always Another Country*, Sisonke Msimang (Text Publishing)
- *I, Migrant*, Sami Shah (Allen & Unwin)
- *Yassmin's Story: Who Do You Think I Am?*, Yassmin Abdel-Magied (Penguin Random House)
- *The Magnificent Life of Miss May Holman*, Lekkie Hopkins (Fremantle Press)