



AUTHOR Q & A

with SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN, author of *We Are Not In Pakistan*

GLE: Although Pakistan is in the title, the stories take place in various countries around the world. What does the title evoke for you?

SSB: In the title story of the collection, sixteen-year-old Kathleen reflects that, unlike her Pakistani grandmother, even Dorothy (of *Wizard of Oz* fame) knew when she wasn't in Kansas anymore. "We are not in Pakistan" resonates through the story. You can meditate on this assertion as you read the rest of the stories. Are we not in Pakistan? If not, are we in Pakistan? Why or why not? Your response will depend on your image of Pakistan, if any, where you are on the planet when you read the book, and what you feel about geopolitical issues. It's provocative. See if you agree with it.

GLE: The stories are set in different places, times, and even, different species — one story is told from the perspective of a Lhasa Apso. How did pushing the boundaries of conventional narrative free you as a writer?

SSB: To cross culture and species, I needed to accept hyphenation and hybridism. Writing each story freed me from one more fear of someone different from me, allowed me to find love for and see humanity in characters I didn't necessarily like. Each story offered a glimpse, if ever so brief, of the feeling that I could be anyone but for an accident of birth, but for economic circumstances and memory. Call it the joy of pluralism.

GLE: Is there a central theme, or idea, you're hoping to convey to readers with this collection?

SSB: I hope this collection raises many questions in an entertaining way: Are we open to complexity or in search of simple answers? What's our relationship to art? Why do we hurt those whom we love? How do we express both the feminine and masculine sides of ourselves in the face of our fears?

GLE: You are a hyphenated woman — Indo-Canadian writer, Canadian-born, American-based. How do you feel about those hyphens and how do you see yourself?

SSB: "I am where I am supposed to be," says Karan, at the end of "The Distance Between Us", and though I quite often don't agree with my characters, it feels like he expressed this line for me. I witness, I learn. And going further than Karan in the story, I hope to become as hyphenated as possible, to become more human.