

Chelsea Worthing's speech at Tabor Adelaide



Hello, my name is Chelsea and Rosanne Hawke asked me to read her new book and say a few things about it.

The book is called *Taj and the Great Camel Trek* and it is about exploring Outback Australia. It is about a journey, using camels, that starts in Beltana, South Australia, and goes to Perth in Western Australia in the year 1875. It tells about the struggles of travelling through the desert. Along the way, the camels have to be let loose each night so they can

eat. Sometimes they go very far away and it takes a long time to find them again. Also, there is a constant struggle to find enough water. Sometimes the waterholes are dried up or do not have enough for the camels. Other times the water doesn't taste very good.

The story of the camel trek is told through the eyes of Taj Saleh. Taj is an Afghan boy of about 12 years of age. He is not actually sure when his birthday is or just how old he is. His father is in charge of the camels on the journey and Taj comes along with him, along with his own camel, the young Mustara. Mustara is a very smart camel and Taj loves him a lot. Mustara was even able once to find his way home after a sand storm, saving the life of Taj and his friend Emmeline.

Other characters include Taj's father, who Taj simply calls Padar, the explorers: Ernest Giles, the group's leader, Mr William Tietkens, second in command, Jess Young, a British officer, Alec Rose, son of the explorer John Rose, Peter Nicholls, the cook, and Tommy, the young aboriginal guide. Together this group has to survive. Along the way, they also learn much about each other. Taj's father Selah Mohammed often tells stories from the old country at night, and Mr Giles often recites poetry. Alec teaches young Taj to write, and Taj gradually learns more about himself and the mystery of why his mother left him and his father.

The Aboriginal boy Tommy is also reluctant to see his relatives when he passes through his country, and then learns that many of them have died from a great sickness. Taj is curious why Tommy does not want to return home but is afraid to ask him – just like he is afraid to ask his father why his mother left. While reading the book I was curious to learn whether Taj finally gets the courage to ask these questions. This is one of the things that keeps the reader's interest during the story.

We learn a lot about history and other cultures from this book. First, we learn about the history of Australia and exploring the Outback. We learn about how they used camels, maps and compasses. We learn much about Afghani culture through Taj and his father. They are Muslims and have prayer rugs and they will not eat meat unless a prayer has been said over the animal as it is killed in the right way. There are a lot of Afghan words in the book. *Hooshta* is what you say when you want your camel to sit down, and *Al hum du lillah* means praise be to God. We also learn some things about Aboriginal culture through Tommy and some of the Aboriginal people they meet along their journey.

Rosanne Hawke has done a lot of research about camels and Afghan culture to write this book. It was good to see these events through the eyes of someone my own age.