

Interview Questions for Mamta Jain Valderrama

1. Why did you write *A Girl In Traffick*?

MJV: I wrote *A Girl In Traffick* because I wanted to shed light on organ trafficking – this type of human trafficking rarely gets media attention, at least compared to other forms of human trafficking such as sex trafficking. I worked at a large kidney care company for several years where I interacted regularly with patients who needed dialysis to survive. The only other treatment option for them was a kidney transplant. But finding a matching organ is difficult, there are a lot of challenges. I think humans' basic instinct is to survive and when people are desperate, some of them will go to extremes. I want to get people thinking about the ethics around organ trafficking and organ donation because when we really look at it, the issue may not be so black and white.

2. How big of a problem is kidney disease?

MJV: According to the National Kidney Foundation, in the US alone, 26 million Americans have kidney disease and most of them don't know it. When someone's kidney disease worsens to the point that their kidneys fail, that's when they need dialysis or a transplant. More than 650,000 Americans have kidney failure. Only 17,000 of those people get kidney transplants every year. That's less than three percent. We're talking about transplants that are regulated and monitored from legal donations – within the United States. That leaves thousands of people living on dialysis who are desperate for a kidney transplant. As I outline in my book, dialysis is serious. Patients have to do dialysis for their entire lives. It's at least twelve hours each week stuck in a dialysis chair. And after treatments, patients are tired and drained, not to mention the emotional and mental strain.

3. Was there any one person who was your inspiration for Juhi Gupta, the main character?

MJV: It's funny because I started about fifteen drafts of my book before I was finally happy with the finished product. In the first half of those, my protagonist was a twelve-year-old boy. But I kept getting stuck while writing. Coincidentally, around that time, I was invited to an event in West Hollywood hosted by the author and scholar, Reza Aslan. He was interviewing BJ Novak, a writer and actor, from *The Office* and other major productions. You know how they say it takes the average person seven times to hear a message before it sinks in? In that interview, Novak advised the audience, who were writers or aspiring writers like me, to "write what you know." It's so obvious and it wasn't the first time I heard that message...in fact I think I heard it exactly six times prior to that night. The next day, I changed my protagonist to a twelve-year-old girl, Juhi Gupta, and I was no longer stuck. So after that long answer, the short answer is, technically no one was my inspiration but I could obviously relate to a young girl much more than a boy.

4. In the book, you seem to justify the other main character, Kevin Whitman, purchasing a kidney to save his own life. Do you think it's okay to buy and sell human organs?

MJV: My goal in this book is to get people thinking about the medical ethics with a marketplace for human organs. As a former journalist, I present both sides of the story. I want my readers to feel

sympathetic to both Juhi, whose life is shattered by a kidney stolen from her father, and Kevin, who needs a kidney transplant in order to live. No, I don't think it is ethical to steal organs or dupe people into "selling" or "donating" their organs. But is there room for a legal marketplace to buy and sell organs? I don't have a clear answer on that. It's complicated and raises huge ethical questions, which are exactly the reasons that I wrote this book.

5. What's the most important thing readers will learn from *A Girl In Traffick*?

MJV: I hope my readers will learn that organ trafficking is not a myth and that survival is such an innate part of our human fabric. On a lighter note, if you have never eaten chai and samosas, this book will make you crave them!

6. When do you write? Is it easier to write in the morning or at night?

MJV: I call myself a during-naptime writer and entrepreneur. In 2014, I decided to leave my six-figure corporate job to pursue my dream of writing a novel. One year later, I was pregnant with my daughter. I set a goal to finish writing and to complete two rounds of edits before my daughter was born. Parts of my book are dark and harrowing, and on some days I actually had to muster the courage to flip open my laptop and face my own manuscript! One of my fun facts is that I love cupcakes and I love butterflies. To balance my day, I would literally look at pictures of beautiful cupcakes and butterflies on the Internet during my writing breaks. I obviously couldn't eat all of those cupcakes while pregnant, but it made me happy to see the beautiful images. I used to run a blog called Cupcakes and Butterflies.

There was still a lot of work to do on my book after my daughter was born. When she was a baby, she woke up at 2 AM to eat. I worked until 5 AM after feeding her. It was the only quiet time that I could find. That definitely wasn't sustainable but I did it for the first year as a new mom. Life of an entrepreneur!

7. Who's your favorite author?

MJV: There are too many incredible fiction authors to pick just one but Khaled Hosseini and Jhumpa Lahiri are at the very top. Abraham Verghese, who wrote *Cutting For Stone*, is a favorite as well as Charlotte Rogan, who wrote *The Lifeboat*. In memoirs, I really enjoyed Liz Murray's *Breaking Night*, about her story of going from homeless to Harvard University.

8. What's next for you?

MJV: I'm currently writing a children's book about ethical chocolate. Seventy-five percent of the world's chocolate is grown in western Africa where they use slave labor and child labor. Additionally, they use farming practices that are depleting the land. There is a big movement that's been around for a few years now in the chocolate world to grow and make chocolate with ethical standards—both from a human perspective as well as environmental. Now that I have a daughter and we only eat fair chocolate in our home, I have been thinking about how to explain that concept to her and to other children.

On the literary fiction side, I'm always developing story ideas but two are more promising than others right now. We'll see how it continues to unfold.

I'm also designing a new type of baby blanket that can be used indoors and outdoors. I wanted something like it when my daughter was a baby but couldn't find it anywhere. So like most new inventions, I made it. I'm tinkering with it now to see if it's something that might have mass appeal.

9. Where can we buy the book?

MJV: A Girl In Traffick is available in print and Kindle editions on [Amazon](#). Or you can buy it via my website at www.mamtajainvalderrama.com.



About the Author:

Mamta Jain Valderrama is a writer and entrepreneur. Formerly a healthcare strategist, she learned about the difficulties involved in kidney transplants and the daily suffering of those living on dialysis. These important social-justice issues inspired her to write *A Girl in Traffick*.

Valderrama graduated from George Washington University with a bachelor's degree in journalism. After working as a reporter, she went on to receive her MBA from the University of Southern California, where she wrote an award-winning business plan centered on medical tourism. As a first-generation Indian American, she has visited many of the beautiful and intriguing places she describes in her novel, both in the United States and India. She now resides in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter.

Book Details

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