



# MY BEST FRIEND AND OTHER ILLUSIONS

by Suri Rosen

Charlie is a budding acrobat who's desperate to attend a gymnastics camp that will qualify her for a spot in the renowned travelling circus Circo Circo. But her mom can barely make ends meet, and Charlie knows she must find a way to earn the money on her own. The solution seems to come when the perfect gymnastics partner mysteriously appears. Now Charlie can put on shows with him. There's just one small thing though . . . this perfect partner is someone Charlie knows well. He's Rudy, her imaginary childhood friend — only this time he's real. But the problem with imaginary friends is that they know things . . . things that can make a whole lot of trouble, jeopardize Charlie's acrobatic dreams, and threaten to tear her family apart.

## Discussion:

1. Why is it so important for Charlie to be able to go to the gymnastics camp in Montreal and why is she desperate to join Circo Circo? What is it that Charlie really wants?
2. If you could design the perfect camp program for the summer, what would it be like? Where would it be and what activities would it offer?
3. Charlie keeps going along with Miles's schemes because she's worried that he'll get into trouble playing poker. Have you ever had a problem because someone you cared about was getting into trouble? What did you do? What should a person do?
4. In the alleyway scene, Charlie and Miles watch Rudy tumble, and Charlie comments that everyone gets their own package in life and hers is Miles. What does Charlie mean? And what's your package?
5. Why do you think Miles becomes so close to Pooja?
6. Is Rudy a reliable friend to Charlie? Give examples of his behaviour to back up your opinion. What do you think makes a reliable friend?
7. Have you ever had an imaginary friend? If you could invent the perfect imaginary friend and make them real, what would they be like?

## Discussion continued:

8. Kat can be an insensitive girl, at times cruel. What does her presence in the story reveal about the other characters?
9. What qualities does Miles have that make him not just a brother but a best friend to Charlie? What qualities do you think a true friend has?
10. Charlie is shocked and betrayed when Rudy performs with Kat at the Rocket Stadium talent show. Why does she feel disappointed? What qualities in Rudy drive him to perform with Kat?

## Writing Prompts:

1. If you had an imaginary friend come to life, what kind of trouble might that cause? Write an adventure that you might have together.
2. Make a comic strip of the time that you figured out your new best friend was actually your imaginary friend who came to life.
3. Charlie is happiest and filled with joy when she does gymnastics. What activities make you happiest and fill you with joy? Record yourself doing that activity, write about it, or make a poster of what it is that makes you happiest.
4. Read the Q & A with Miles below, then write your own Q & A for your favourite character from the book!

## Q and A with Miles Green, Charlie Green's younger brother

**Q: To be kind of honest, you're not really the star of this story. How does that make you feel?**

**A:** Excuse me, but have you even read the thing? This book really should have been called *My Little Brother and Other Awesome Heroes*. Are you forgetting that I was the one who figured out how to hide Rudy? And I was the one who connected to Pooja? And Pooja tracked down my grandparents! Actually, now that I think about it, I'm kind of miffed that I wasn't in the title. I'm definitely going to give the author, Suri Rosen, a talking to.

**Q: You and Charlie sure got into a lot of trouble. What was driving the two of you?**

**A:** Things — boy, do they cause mayhem. I couldn't help that Charlie had this . . . . thing about me playing poker online. And I had this thing about helping her get to her gymnastics camp. So maybe that was the problem. We were so determined to help each other and I guess when you have all these things piling up, you end up with the police knocking on your door. Wait, what?

**Q: Do you think the story was sad? Some readers said they cried.**

**A:** Not me! No siree, Bob! I absolutely, definitely, unquestionably, for sure didn't cry when I found out that Rudy was gone. And do not believe Charlie if she told you that I did — I just had . . . . um . . . . a runny nose. Yeah, that's right — it was a runny nose. But despite that, it was definitely a very happy ending. I mean, come on, have you met my grandparents? And do you see how chill Mom is now? Happy endings rock.

**Q: Where did you get the idea for the book?**

**A:** A number of years ago, I took my daughter and her friend swimming. On the way back they had a lively discussion about some people that I'd never heard of. When we got home, I asked her who she was talking about and she told me that they were discussing their imaginary friends from childhood. (I probably don't need to say "from childhood," do I? Because if you have an imaginary friend as an adult, it's maybe not as adorable?) I tried to imagine what her friend was like and what would happen if he came back to meet us.

**Q: Is there anything autobiographical about the story?**

**A:** I think that when I was a kid, I thought that maybe I was an imaginary friend. I was such a hard-core daydreamer that I'm still not sure if I was real. Seriously, how would I even know? Charlie's story is just me daydreaming again. But with more adjectives.

**Q: How long did it take you to write it?**

**A:** I started writing it a long time ago and at the time I actually thought I was writing a comedy. But when it was done, I was shocked by how much sadness was in the book. So I abandoned it for two years, but I really missed Charlie and Miles. So a couple of years ago, I finished it off, sadness, laughter, happy ending and all.

**Q: There are definite themes in the book about memory and family. What inspired that?**

**A:** Many years ago when we lived in Manhattan, I read a short comment in a local newspaper about the effect on kids when parents move out of town because of job or educational opportunities. Kids sometimes can feel alone and scared if their parents are upset with them and they don't have grandparents and relatives around to also love them. That made a huge impression on me and it became one of the main sources of Charlie's loneliness. And it also became the source for the resolution.

**Q: Are you similar to the protagonist, Charlie?**

**A:** No way. She's way nicer than me!

**Q: Did you know how the story was going to end when you wrote it?**

**A:** At first Rudy was a bit of a conundrum. I mean, logistically how would you get a social insurance number for an imaginary friend? Or a credit card? But by the time I wrote it, his fate was SO clear since he was the vehicle for the resolution that brought Charlie a healthy heaping of family.

**Q: Are you thinking about writing a sequel?**

**A:** I wasn't until you mentioned it . . .