

*People often ask me how this book began...*

I got the idea when I was walking down London's King's Road one afternoon, crisp autumn air, long shadows before me, when BOING! It just popped into my head.

Everyone's interested in invisible forces around us, I realized, but most books on that are stuck talking about mysticism, or conspiracy theories. Yet what Einstein saw with his equation  $E=mc^2$  was real: an understanding of the universe that's all-encompassing, quite invisible to most people...yet true.

I hurried to the Sloane Square station, and once home, and the kids were asleep, wrote a quick 3-page outline, sending it off to my agent in New York. I knew I couldn't start the actual book yet – I had business projects for at least a year – but that wasn't too bad. It always helps to spend a while reading before jumping into a book. I also had painfully learned that it's wise Not to take detailed notes at this preliminary stage. (Otherwise, when you do start writing you're swamped with hundreds of pages.) It's better – at least for me – just to read widely, and try to get the overall shape of what you're interested in clear in your mind. A lot of publishers turned the idea down but curiously that didn't bother me: I knew it was a very good idea.

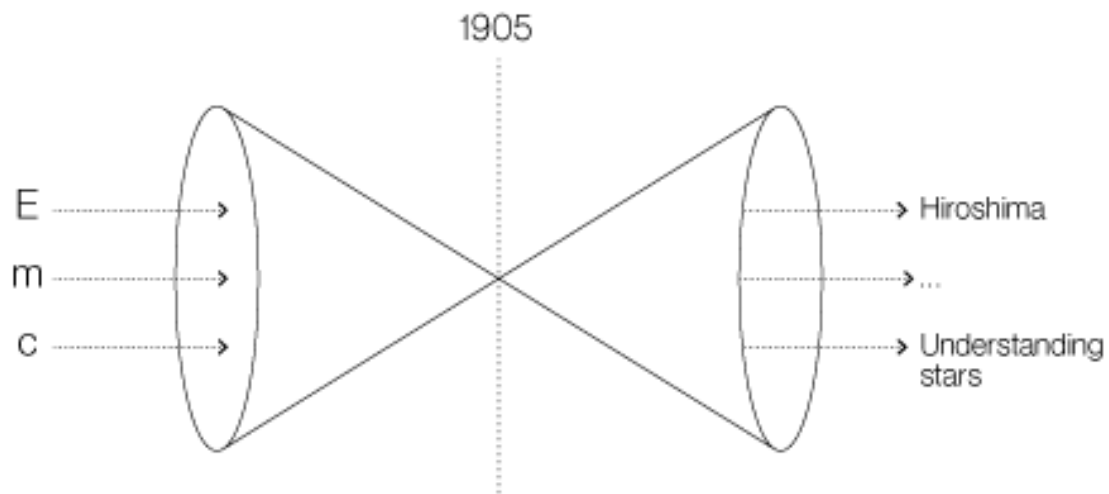
When I finally did have the time to write I saw that I couldn't simply gear it around a biography of Einstein. There were many perfectly good biographies already, and I was interested only in this one aspect of his work: not everything he'd done. Yet how to do justice to  $E=mc^2$  and what it means *without* going through his entire life?

My children were going to be away and I thought that would be ideal for cracking the structure. This was a great miscalculation, for I'd had no idea how much I'd miss them. After the first day, when even sleeping in wasn't as great as I'd fantasized (not least because I was so used to getting up early that 'sleeping in' didn't last much past 6), I was disconsolate. Soon I was boring my London friends with detailed stories - and displays of photos - about the rituals I'd had with them at home, and which were now so sorely lacking: the cereal, the stories, the wrestling and more. (Later I came to see why that wrestling meant so much; here's [a brief memoir](#) on that.)

In time though, the days till their return were counting down, I managed to force myself to concentrate. The structure wouldn't be a straight line, with events in Einstein's life arranged in sequences. Instead, I could invert my focus. It wasn't going to be a biography of Einstein.

It was going to be a biography of the equation.

The moment I had that everything became clear. Every book I do has a guiding diagram, and now I realized what this one's was:



At the left, coming in from the past, would be all the things that entered into 'E=mc<sup>2</sup>': the concept of energy (which is what the 'E' stands for), the concept of mass (the 'm'), and the rest. Then in the middle, the vertical line, was 1905 where all those inputs swooped into Einstein's mind and he put them together, creating that famous equation. Finally, on the right, coming out of that, would be the consequences: from the deaths at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to understanding how the sun burns, and how our world will evolve.

With that in mind the writing was easy, even with two eager children back. I've always liked working at night, and a big striped chair in the children's bedroom was ideal to settle in. When I looked up I could see them trustingly asleep around me. Given all the turmoil the equation's life had encompassed, I found that intensely comforting.