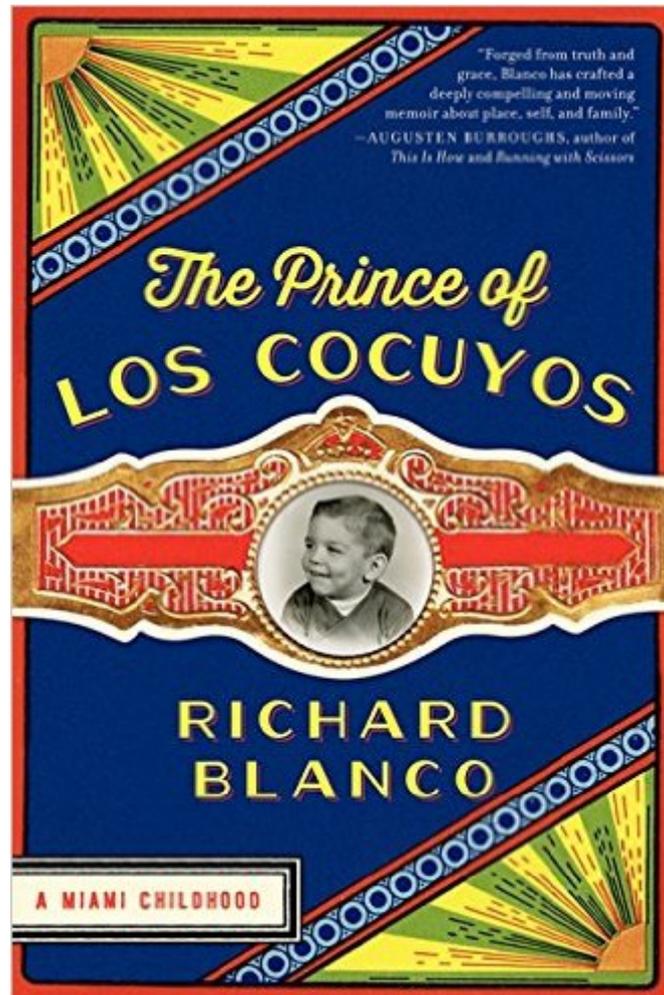


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The Prince Of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood



Synopsis

A poignant, hilarious, and inspiring memoir from the first Latino and openly gay inaugural poet, which explores his coming-of-age as the child of Cuban immigrants and his attempts to understand his place in America while grappling with his burgeoning artistic and sexual identities. Richard Blanco's childhood and adolescence were experienced between two imaginary worlds: his parents' nostalgic world of 1950s Cuba and his imagined America, the country he saw on reruns of *The Brady Bunch* and *Leave it to Beaver*—an "exotic" life he yearned for as much as he yearned to see "la patria." Navigating these worlds eventually led Blanco to question his cultural identity through words; in turn, his vision as a writer—as an artist—prompted the courage to accept himself as a gay man. In this moving, contemplative memoir, the 2013 inaugural poet traces his poignant, often hilarious, and quintessentially American coming-of-age and the people who influenced him. A prismatic and lyrical narrative rich with the colors, sounds, smells, and textures of Miami, Richard Blanco's personal narrative is a resonant account of how he discovered his authentic self and ultimately, a deeper understanding of what it means to be American. His is a singular yet universal story that beautifully illuminates the experience of "becoming"—how we are shaped by experiences, memories, and our complex stories: the humor, love, yearning, and tenderness that define a life.

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Customer Reviews

"Made in Cuba, assembled in Spain, imported to the USA" is how Blanco describes his story in shorthand. So, you would expect his memoir to be filled with stories and reflections that are

completely unique to him. And, he has done just that - in a brilliant, engaging and, at times, hilarious way. However, he's also written a story that speaks to anyone who has tried to find their place in the world and within their own family. His descriptions of family members are both vivid and yet somehow familiar, regardless of your ethnic heritage. Blanco's stories will have you unexpectedly thinking about your own family, as well as the tales and trials that make up your personal story. In my case, his abuelita and my nana could have been sisters - perhaps because of the DNA that is commonly found in tough, immigrant grandmothers. In his "For All of Us, One Day: An Inaugural Poet's Journey", Blanco provided a glimpse into his journey that left me wanting to experience more of the journey. "The Prince of los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood" more than satisfies that craving.

It is important when you read this memoir that you read what Richard Blanco says at the beginning because what he does is define memoir which is not the same as an autobiography. In other words, this poet turned memoirist makes clear that he, at times, fictionalizes but only for the purpose of enhancing what he is writing about. You will, I think, be trapped within the first few pages when you meet his Cuban-born abuela (grandmother) who is a character you want staying in the pages, not living next door! I love how Mr. Blanco is able to reach back into his past, especially with this abuela, and find the kernels that make her an important component of his childhood including her homophobic rants and what, today, we would all recognize as child abuse. But she brought with her, as did the rest of his family, the ways of some Cubans. Because I live in South Beach and interact every day with Cubans, mostly those who were born here, of course, I especially liked this memoir because it is salted with information (and espanol as well) that I have experienced. Like his wonderful poetry, this is a wonderful memoir.

Told with loads of warmth, and humor, Richard Blanco recounts growing up in Miami with his Cuban family, as he grapples with his identity as an American, a Cuban, and a gay man. As much as I enjoyed the first half of the book, it was the latter part that I found the most affecting and moving. But all of it reads as if your best friend is recounting fantastic rich stories from their childhood.

Having long been a fan of Mr Blanco's poetry I was motivated to see his prose efforts. I was not disappointed. The vignettes of his upbringing written in such a natural refreshing manner delighted and opened insight to a time and place. The old writers admonition "Write what you know," could not be more true here as Blanco unravels his ball of yarn memories in a very readable manner, causing the dilemma of whether to rush forward and see more or stop and ponder the scenario just digested

putting off the inevitable end of book. I hope this is but a first of many efforts by him to give us a beguiling humorous look into his many adventures. Can't recommend this one enough.

In this memoir, Blanco uses his gift for poetry to infuse his prose with something akin to magic. The scenes of his childhood questioning who he was, a Cuban, an American, a Spaniard, a gay man, come to life in Technicolor. Filled with angst, innocence and tenderness, the palette Blanco uses reveals an artist of the first order. Few writers can explore the depth of emotions as honestly as Blanco can and has in *The Prince of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood*. If you haven't read this book yet, don't wait. I highly recommend it.

Richard Blanco's childhood stories growing up in Miami are hilarious (his convincing his grandmother to host their first traditional Thanksgiving "which starts with her thawing the turkey in the backyard grass), and heartbreaking (his growing up being constantly told men are to behave like men and never appear feminine let alone be gay), while showing the tug-o-war he felt with accepting his family's culture and pushing it away for the American way. From beginning to end this was an entertaining and full of heart look at growing-up Cuban-American in Miami. (If you're wondering what a cocuyo is it's a click beetle that has glowing green eyes. It's Miami's version of a firefly.)

I loved this book after hearing him talk about it on "Book TV"; it made me laugh almost every page, it was engrossing, never boring, and also touching (especially at the end) when he synthesizes his feelings about his Cuban yearnings and non-background (!) and also his many American experiences and privileges! I hated to have it end. I am recommending it highly to all my reading friends!!

In a time when immigration seems to be a cursed word Richard Blanco reminds us about growing up in an immigrant family. The anxiety to belong, somewhere, anywhere. How you can celebrate Thanksgiving as San Giving, and be a gringo while you are a cubano

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