

In conversation with **DANIEL MIYARES**, author of **HOW TO SAY GOODBYE IN CUBAN**



Daniel with his father, Carlos (left)

How to Say Goodbye in Cuban is about your father's life during the Cuban revolution. What inspired you to tell his story?

Over twenty years ago, I moved to Kansas City, Missouri, for my first job out of college. One night, I woke up to the phone ringing. It was my dad calling. He wanted to see how I was doing with the move and encourage me. We hadn't had the best relationship when I was growing up, so this seemed like a big deal. During the call, for the first time, he told me the story of how he escaped Cuba and came to this country. When he began, I fumbled to find a notebook and started feverishly taking notes. He had never shared this with me and my brother growing up. I wasn't sure why because it was such an important part of who he was. I suspected it was an important part of who I was too, whether I knew it or not. I wanted to capture that. I wanted to get the story down in some way, so it didn't just evaporate into thin air. Initially I just filled notebooks with information from our calls. I had no idea what I was going to do with it. It just really mattered that I wrote it down at the time. In my mind, our conversations were a way to bring some healing to our relationship. It took me over twenty years to figure out how to be ready to share it with others.

Did you always plan to publish this story as a graphic novel?

That's a good question. This is my first graphic novel. So it's a new format for me. Initially, I didn't have a format in mind. I have mostly been a picture book maker, but the scope of the story was just too big. Also, my dad's age when the story takes place wouldn't connect to the youngest readers. Middle grade seemed to be the best fit and Anne Schwartz was interested in seeing what I would do with a graphic novel format. I tend to lead with visual storytelling, so this was exciting to me. When I began, I had zero experience making graphic novels. Now I have a much deeper appreciation for all of the levers the format allows you to pull as an author. It's thrilling.

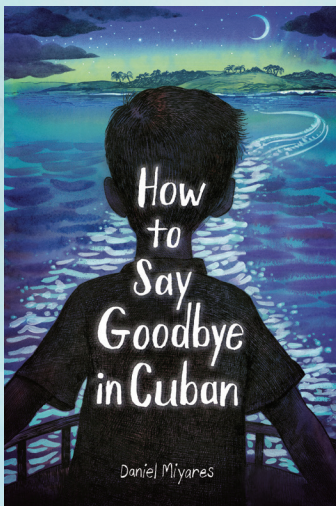
How did being the son of a Cuban immigrant shape your experience growing up?

Growing up I didn't feel any different than any other kid (other than my dad trying to get me and my brother to drink malta—yuck!) and I think that's the way my parents wanted it. My last name was different and harder to pronounce than the other kids, and there was always an understanding that there was a history that went along with that, even though we weren't fully aware of what that was.

My dad worked hard and wanted to be like everyone else. He didn't draw much attention to his Cuban heritage from what we saw. He didn't even speak Spanish in our home—only when my aunts and cousins would come visit. Then we saw a different side of him. He wasn't ashamed of where he came from, but he loved America and the possibilities of it. He even served in the U.S. Army as a young man and then the National Guard later on. I asked him once if he would ever go back to Cuba. He said not until it was free Cuba again.

*What message do you hope readers take from *How to Say Goodbye in Cuban*?*

Well, I hope readers get a sense that the world is a pretty big place where not everyone's experiences are the same as our own, but also that we all share very common things that we dream of and need. Maybe there will be some readers out there who will be able to directly relate to having to flee the home they love for a completely new, unknown, and scary reality. Hopefully they can feel seen.



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