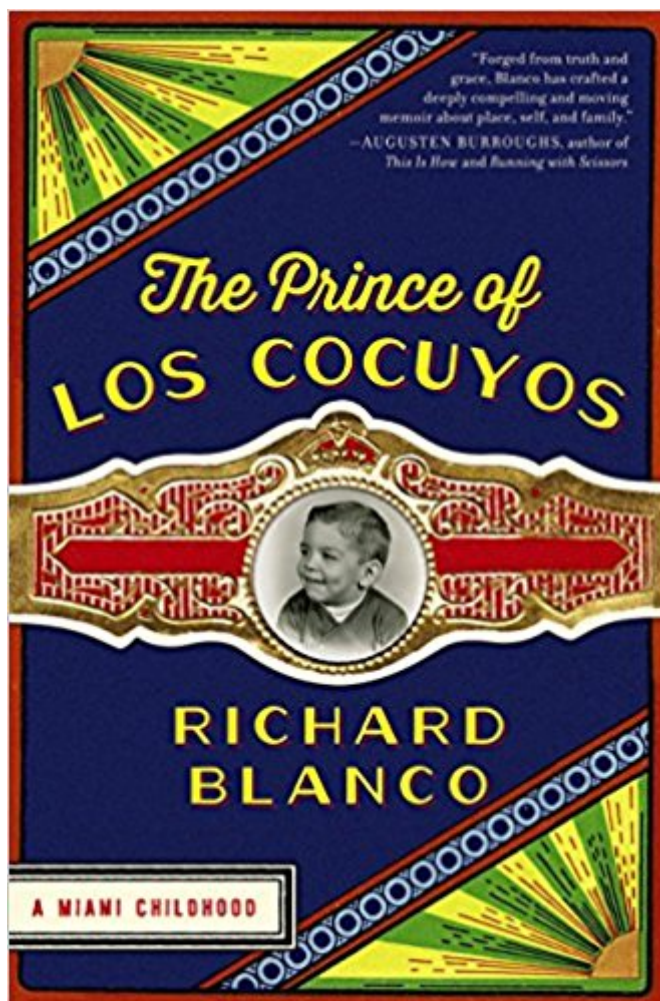


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# The Prince Of Los Cocuyos: A Miami Childhood



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“In this vibrant memoir, Obama-inaugural poet Richard Blanco tenderly, exhilaratingly

chronicles his Miami childhood amid a colorful, if suffocating, family of Cuban exiles, as well as his quest to find his artistic voice and the courage to accept himself as a gay man. *—Â• (O, The Oprah Magazine)* *—Â•* “Richard Blanco takes us on a thought-provoking, often hilarious ride in ... his coming-of-age memoir. The Cuban and Spanish intellectual, who was the first Latino, openly gay man and immigrant to be commissioned a presidential inaugural poet, illustrates the story of his childhood in the 1970s. *—Â• (Latina Magazine)* *—Â•* “The Prince of Los Cocuyos had me laughing time and again with its warm, sweetly self-deprecating portrait of an immigrant family attempting to straddle Cuban traditions and American trends. *—Â• (Andrew Solomon, author of Far From the Tree)* *—Â•* “Thank you, Richard, for this. The Prince of los Cocuyos is revelation and homecoming. *—Â• (Sandra Cisneros, author of The House on Mango Street)* *—Â•* “I adored every minute spent with young *—ËœRiqui* *—â„ç* and his endearing extended family. And at the end—an ending so beautiful and throat-catching—I felt wonderfully drenched in love. *—Â• (Monica Wood, author of When We Were the Kennedys)* *—Â•* “[The Prince of los Cocuyos] includes portraits and scenes, intimately and lovingly rendered *—Â•* | Having honored our nation as a whole in verse, he honors it again, but this time as witness to the life and fortune of one exceptionally American family. *—Â• (Los Angeles Review of Books)* *—Â•* “... the anecdotes Blanco shares *—â œ* such as trying to convince his grandmother to go shopping at the Winn-Dixie supermarket she so feared *—â œ* are muy cubano and will give readers a sense of Cuban family spirit.: *(TheGuardian.com)* *—Â•* “In Richard Blanco *—â„çs* Miami, memories linger outside coffee windows and in Cuban grocery store aisles *—Â•* | In a series of loosely intertwined stories, Blanco describes a childhood marked by loss, humor and hints of an exotic land called America. *—Â• (Associated Press)* *—Â•* “A warm, emotionally intimate memoir. *—Â• (Kirkus Reviews)* *—Â•* “Blanco has a natural, unforced style that allows his characters *—â„ç* vibrancy and humor to shine through. *—Â• (Publishers Weekly (Starred Review))* *—Â•* “A work that is incredibly poignant at one moment, yet hysterically funny with the turn of the page. *—Â• (Huffington Post)* *—Â•* “Filled with colorful characters, often poignant and sometimes melancholy, Blanco *—â„çs* episodic memoir is a meditation on belonging, on self-acceptance, and on his family *—â„çs* almost mystical connection to Cuba. *—Â• (Booklist)* *—Â•* “Blanco *—â„çs* touching reminiscence has a deep emotional truth. . . . [An] alternately hilarious and moving new memoir. *—Â• (Bookpage)* *—Â•* “... this memoir is an exceptional introduction to the writer and his capabilities. The Prince of los Cocuyos embodies the best of his poetic style, in particular his eye for detail and ability to put the reader right in the place where he is. *—Â• (Orlando Weekly)* *—Â•* “[A] sensual new memoir *—Â•* | Blanco *—â„çs* ear for poetry comes to light in

the memoir’s full-bodied language and knack for description [evoking] the flavors, fabrics and smells of rundown South Beach hotels, all-night pig roasts, disco-era Quinceañeras debuts. (Atlanta Journal-Constitution) “Forged from truth and grace, Blanco has crafted a deeply compelling and moving memoir about place, self and family. (Augusten Burroughs, author of *This Is How* and *Running With Scissors*) “The Prince of Los Cocuyos is equal parts touching, heart-ache-inducing, and laugh-out-loud funny. (The Daily Beast) “Funny and poignant, Richard Blanco’s *The Prince of Los Cocuyos* follows the author and his Cuban-American family in Miami. The details of this very American, yet immigrant experience make all the difference. (Los Angeles Campus Circle) “Like many a great bildungsroman, *The Prince of Los Cocuyos* ... portrays a character who feels torn between several different worlds. . . . His search for identity, belonging, and home is one that any reader, regardless of sexual orientation or ancestry, is one that anyone can identify with. (The Advocate) “His eloquent and poetic writing has the ability to induce laughter, tears, and anger, sometimes on the same page | Highly recommended, Richard Blanco’s coming-of-age story is told with humor and humility and is a pleasure to read. (Edge Media Network)

Richard Blanco’s prismatic and lyrical memoir of growing up in a family of Cuban exiles in Miami during the 1970s and ’80s, *The Prince of los Cocuyos*, is a rich account of how Blanco, the first Latino and openly gay inaugural poet of the United States, came to understand his place in America while grappling with his burgeoning cultural, artistic, and sexual identities.

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 español as well) that I have experienced. Like his

wonderful poetry, this is a wonderful memoir.

I was right there with Richard as he navigated a life not quite this or quite that. Is he a Cuban or American? is the one unclear place in his life as he gets to explore the America of Disney and hang with more "Americans" -- his other exploration is his sexual preference. It is clear he loves women, especially the relatives who visit, who bring him presents, who squeeze his cheeks, who admire and appreciate him. Of course, Abuela is constantly making him closed in on his already hidden gay feelings. Then what I liked are the young men who came into his life, the ones who are or may be gay, certainly ones who exude life. I love his descriptions of El Cocuyos from the stocking of the wine to the banter of the regulars. Maybe only at the end as he fast forwards to the "now" of his life, it is rushed, but that's where the reader sees he has figured out a lot of his life. I just don't know if I wanted to know that part. That could be Part II of Blanco's memoir, and it may be. I love the author's poetry and love that he was the poet who read at Obama's 2nd inauguration, oh, and that he went to FIU, my alma mater. He brings his poetic senses to the heart of this book.

I have lived in Miami for almost 40 years and have had many first and second generation Cuban friends just like the people in this wonderful memoir. I never fully understood the intensity of their connection to the island until reading this memoir about love and loss of things barely understood. A joyous and sometimes funny read. One of the author's eyes is opened wide by the close of the novel, but the other is only awkwardly beginning to open. I am consoled by knowing how this sensitive and intelligent young man eventually found the special love that once eluded him and grew into a national treasure. Compulsory reading for any child of Cuban exiles, especially if you are from Miami and/or gay.

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.

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 a Miami version of a firefly.)

This is a wonderful trip down the memory lane of Richard Blanco. His story is full of individual moments and stories that will resonate with any reader who has experienced what it means to be different than the dominant culture, and give those who have not an insight into that world. As a child growing up in rural Appalachia with dreams of living on the street with the Anderson's from "Father Knows Best," I identify with his struggles and the obstacles he faces as he stands balanced between two worlds. Filled with beautiful memory pictures and intricate detail, Blanco has written a work that leaves the reader with the same feelings of hope and imagination that his poetry does.

Blanco's story is at once the story of Cuban immigrants and of all immigrants. Wonderful writing and simple: the true qualities of a great writer.

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