

YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award finalist speech, ALA, Jan. 11, 2016

Thank you! ¡Gracias, y gracias a Dios! I am so incredibly grateful to the YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award committee, and to Reka Simonsen, Justin Chanda, Candace Greene McManus, Michelle Leo, and the whole Atheneum/Simon & Schuster publishing team.

More than any of my other books, writing Enchanted Air allowed me to communicate with readers directly, telling only the facts and how I felt about my surrealistic, stranger-than-fiction childhood. I wrote it in present tense to offer young readers a sense of time travel. I wrote it in free verse because poetry makes me happy, and rhythmic, flowing, musical language was the only way I could face excruciating memories.

During the same week when advanced review copies of Enchanted Air arrived on my doorstep, President Obama announced that U.S.-Cuba diplomatic relations would be restored, after 54 years of Cold War hostility. The memoir that had been written as a plea for reconciliation suddenly became a song of thanks.

Just a little over one year ago, I dedicated Enchanted Air to the world's estimated 10 million stateless people. Today, there are more than 50 million. Some of them are in your libraries.

I'm not a refugee, but I experienced an inherited form of exile. Other children of immigrants tell me they share my feeling that an

invisible twin has been left behind. We grew up wondering. We grew up imagining. We live in the space between countries. In my case, that space was both an ocean, and the hyphen between words:

Cuban

American

on page 11, I wrote:

**Sometimes, I feel
like a rolling wave of the sea,
a wave that can only belong
in between
the two solid shores.**

**Sometimes, I feel
like a bridge, or a storm.**

I hope that Enchanted Air will not only speak to young Latinos, but to any reader who feels divided or doubled, half belonging, and half shunned. If there is one factual, documented, verifiable nonfiction concept that I tried to offer with this memoir, it is hope, la esperanza. Thank you. ¡Gracias!

