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When I Was Puerto Rican



Synopsis

Magic, sexual tension, high comedy, and intense drama move through an enchanted yet harsh life chronicle, as a young girl leaves rural Puerto Rico for New York's tenements and a chance for success.

Book Information

Hardcover: 274 pages

Publisher: Addison-Wesley; 1st edition (September 20, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0201581175

ISBN-13: 978-0201581171

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.5 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces

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Customer Reviews

I loved it!! It brought back wonderful memories, being raised by my grandmother from Puerto Rico. It will make you laugh and it will make you cry. Once I started reading the book I could not put it down. If you want to learn about the Puerto Rican Culture, this is the book to read. I highly recommend this book.

Santiago shares with the readers episodes from her life but written through her eyes as a young girl growing up from childhood to early puberty. Looking at the expectations from the perspective of today, it seems unfair that women, let alone oldest daughters, must accept the traditional roles and not complain about husbands or young girls must behave, whether they are ready or not, like young ladies. Santiago makes it very clear that Puerto Rican society accepted double standards for men and women and certainly would reject those who didn't follow "the rules." But her descriptions of what is positive focuses on the beauty of the Puerto Rico, the special holiday seasons, and of course, her mother Ramona's strong persona. She is the most significant figure not only in Santiago's life but for the Santiago family as she is the one, after finally leaving Pablo, who makes

the decision to move the family forever from the island Santiago loves to the cold, harsh climate of Brooklyn, New York. Although part of the book, relates how living conditions were drastically different - a high school where students are diverse in ethnicity but don't socialize, a community where not everyone is Puerto Rican, being confined to the apartment to avoid crime on the streets and experiencing for the first time the snowy, bleak winter season - Santiago also talks of her relationship with Ramona moving from the latter taking care of the daughter as she did in Puerto Rico to Santiago taking her own steps at being independent. She comes to her high school principal to be put back a grade until she proves her academic abilities and is given the opportunity to apply to the High School of Performing Arts, which she sees as her ticket out of Brooklyn and into a new and different world. I am not Puerto Rican but Santiago's book mirrors cultural, generational and social conflicts that are universal for anyone who reads her autobiography. Santiago's autobiography is worthwhile reading.

My son enjoyed reading this book for school.

I expect the reason this novel was published is because it is a unique autobiography. However, it's only half a story - assume this is contrived in the hope of selling the other half at a later date. The author's reconstruction of dialogue is to be admired, as well as the descriptions of her life of poverty and deprivation. More to be admired is the character of her mother who managed to produce and provide for eleven children in an unmarried state, while coping with an irresponsible father. Can only recommend if you're looking for a holiday read. Very little material for book club discussions.

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