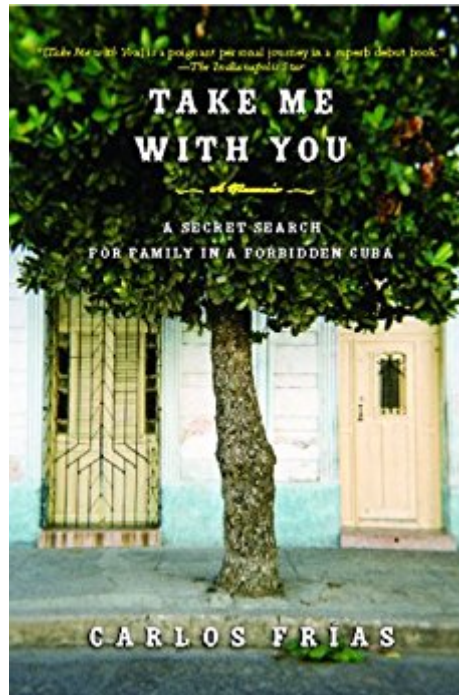


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Take Me With You: A Memoir



Synopsis

Carlos FrÃ- as, an award-winning journalist and the American-born son of Cuban exiles, grew up hearing about his parents' homeland only in parables. Their Cuba, the one they left behind four decades ago, was ethereal. It existed, for him, only in their anecdotes, and in the family that remained in Cuba -- merely ghosts on the other end of a telephone. Until Fidel Castro fell ill. Sent to Cuba by his newspaper as the country began closing to foreign journalists in August 2006, FrÃ- as begins the secret journey of a lifetime -- twelve days in the land of his parents. That experience led to this evocative, spectacular, and unforgettable memoir. *Take Me With You* is written through the unique eyes of a first-generation Cuban-American seeing the forbidden country of his ancestry for the first time. *Take Me With You* provides a fresh view of Cuba, devoid of overt political commentary, focusing instead on the gritty, tangible lives of the people living in Castro's Cuba. FrÃ- as takes in the island nation of today and attempts to reconstruct what the past was like for his parents, retracing their footsteps, searching for his roots, and discovering his history. The book creates lasting and unexpected ripples within his family on both sides of the Florida Straits -- and on the author himself.

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Customer Reviews

Take Me with You is a memoir like no other. Author Carlos Frias sneaks the reader into the dark decay of forbidden Cuba with a whispered agreement: Reader must acknowledge the grave danger in which his Cuban relatives have placed themselves by being candid. Further, we must help protect them by never insisting that names or descriptions of meetings be entirely accurate. Any book that draws the reader into a life-and-death contract from the get-go, promises to deliver a riveting read. Take Me with You makes good on that promise. Frias, an award-winning journalist and the American-born son of Cuban exiles living in south Florida, snaps up an assignment to cover Cuba during Castro's illness in 2006. For him, this is more than an assignment; it's an opportunity to discover the mythical Cuba spun from the collective nostalgia, heartbreak, and personal secrets of his parents and their community. It's a homecoming in a place he never actually lived. Posing as a wide-eyed tourist while Cuba is ejecting all journalists, Frias bluffs his way into the country from Cancun for twelve days that will change his life. Take Me with You is the work of a master storyteller, and it's a good thing. This is a complex book: one part memoir, one part history book, one part travelogue, and one part love letter to Frias's parents. It's flawlessly written to capture the heart-pounding danger of his mission, the despair and hope of Cuba's people, and the passionate love of family separated by miles of ocean and years of time. Take Me with You is breathtaking. Frias just set the new standard for memoir.

Through Carlos Frias' heart-felt scribing, I stowed away to Cuba on this amazing journey. His descriptive writing truly brings the smells of Havana's streets and Cuban coffee into your home. This is a must read for anyone who has ever wondered what daily life is like behind the Cuban curtain. I wait with earnest for Carlos' next gift to the literary world.

This is a well-written and very moving book. The newly-developing connections between family members across a 90 mile body of water give poignant life to "Take Me With You." The secondary story, and to my mind, the most important part, is that the book lets a breathe of fresh air into America's view of a sealed country. I was particularly struck by the two-faced nature of Castro's Cuba. The Cuba seen by tourists is a stage set. The houses on Elian Gonzale's street are painted and repaired so news casts shown in the rest of the world will present a nice image of Cuba. The infrastructure and houses in the neighborhoods of the ordinary folks are crumbling and decaying.

The facade continues with churches, hotels and restaurants that only tourists are allowed to visit. The deprivations in terms of meat, medical supplies and adequate modern sewer systems is inexcusable, and Frias's expressed need of protecting his Cuban cousins by using fictive names is tragic. The neighborhood watch that squeals on its neighbors and the author's fear that his journals will be found in his suitcase are chilling. This book by a Cuban-American will make the reader more appreciative of life in the United States and of the resilience of every day Cubans who must "go along to get along." This book is an excellent companion piece to "This is Cuba" by Ben Corbett. Both books will leave you amazed and angry. Kim Burdick Stanton, Delaware

In my early 30s I lived for awhile in Miami not far from Calle Ocho and now I live in Tampa (also a Cuban enclave) and for years I have heard stories of Cuba...stories in bits and pieces about communism repression, ration cards, Old American cars, forced attendance at demonstrations, Comit  de Defensa de la Revoluci n (CDR), flights of freedom, Elian Gonz lez, Che Guevara, the beaches, hardship and poverty as well as some pretty heart-wrenching immigration stories. However, the stories have always come out in bits and pieces and I always felt I was missing so much of the story. While I yearned for a more complete story, I understood it was a delicate subject and have refrained from asking too many questions. Well, Carlos Frias in his memoir really painted a whole and complete story about Cuba, the Cuban experience, as well as the Cuban American experience. An amazing story and a great insight. It was also a wonderful read.

This memoir is the most unabashedly emotional I've ever read. At times, I thought it was too emotional (therefore: four stars not five); but it hooked me despite--or maybe because of--the author's heartfelt writing. This is a true story of family, known and unknown previously, left behind in Cuba. But, of course, it's more. It's really the story of Cuba since Castro. And, before Castro, too. All is told through family members' stories. (And, it's a huge extended family!) Because this is such a personal tale, we feel along with the author, an American born here into a Cuban-American family. The author, in a twelve day trip to Cuba, cannot decide whether his heart belongs to his Cuban family or to his family in the U.S. (He has a very hard time not getting enmeshed in his Cuban family's lives. They need him, and they idolize him. And, vice-versa, too.) A good deal of Frias' sadness in Cuba is a kind of "survivor guilt", a feeling that he has it so good here, and they, in Cuba, are struggling. There's only so much he can do! It's clear that the visit with his relatives and to know Cuba from a non-tourist viewpoint has changed the author. Maybe it's changed us, the readers, too.

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