



**BY**  
**TERRY CATASÚS JENNINGS**  
**Illustrated by**  
**MARLA CRUZ LINARES**

**¡Buenos días! Come along for a day in Cuba. Take la guagua to the beach, play los escondidos in the park, and snack on bumpy anones. Cuban author Jennings and illustrator Linares draw on their lived experience to create this playful board book, which includes simple educational endnotes, as part of the Our World series for very young readers.**

## **REVIEWS**

**This series offers solid glimpses of faraway places, more poetry than a tour guide . . . evocative and inviting” – School Library Journal**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Mini Bio:

Terry Catasús Jennings is a Cuban-American writer who left her beloved island at age 12. Terry's goal is to write fun, engaging, or thought provoking books that lead us to mutual understanding as well as to sing the praises of Cuban food. Terry lives in Reston, Virginia with her husband. She is represented by Natalie Lakosil of Looking Glass Literary and Media Management.

### Short Bio:

Terry Catasús Jennings is a Cuban-American writer who left her beloved island at age 12. In *Our World Cuba*, she brings the island to young readers by portraying the day in the life of a toddler in Cuba—different from a toddler's day in another country, but yet so much the same—the perfect way to lead us to embrace our commonalities from the cradle as well as sing the praises of Cuban food. Terry lives in Reston, Virginia with her husband. She is represented by Natalie Lakosil of Looking Glass Literary and Media Management.

### Not So Short:

On September 11, 1961, Terry Catasús Jennings landed in the United States with her family after a short flight from Cuba. Their only possessions were \$50 and one suitcase each. Her family, including her father, who had been jailed during the Bay of Pigs invasion, was now in a free country. On September 12, Terry found herself enrolled in seventh grade, drowning in a sea of English she didn't understand.

With time and help, the family thrived. Terry was a late bloomer in her writing career. The *Definitely Dominguita* series was named SLJ, Kirkus, and Parents Latina Best Books of 2021. Her biography in verse, *Pauli Murray, The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist* was a winner of the Septima P. Clark Book Award for 2023. In *The Little House of Hope*, a Junior Library Guild Selection illustrated by Pura Belpré medalist Raúl Colón, Jennings portrays her immigrant experience, showing how a helping hand in a new land can make a life-saving difference for a family.

Now, in *Our World Cuba*, Jennings is delighted to have had the opportunity to share her childhood experiences in her beloved island—from rowing trips with her father on Saturdays, to playing in the sand at the beach, to eating her favorite foods—including eating anones and spitting out the seeds. With this beautiful board book, Terry again encourages us all to embrace our common

humanity and sings the praises of Cuban food. She lives in Reston, Virginia with her husband, and enjoys visiting with her five grandchildren, often encouraging them to bring their parents along. She is a member of SCBWI, Las Musas Latinx Collaborative and the Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC. Terry is represented by Natalie Lakosil of Looking Glass Literary and Media Management.



### Longer Bio:

On September 11, 1961, Terry Catasús Jennings landed in the United States with her family after a short flight from Cuba. Their only possessions were \$50 and one suitcase each. Her family, including her father, who had been jailed during the Bay of Pigs invasion, was now in a free country. On September 12, Terry found herself enrolled in seventh grade drowning in a sea of English she didn't understand. Often being the only Cuban in her school—even through college—Terry knows what it's like to be the new kid on the block.

As a child, Terry dreamed of being an author, but she was dissuaded from a writing career by an insensitive teacher and instead majored in math and physics at the University of Richmond, in Virginia. She worked in finance for many years.

Terry began writing in earnest when her children were in high school. She wrote for newspapers and magazines, as well as educational text for the Smithsonian and internet sources. Her first published books were science-based narrative non-fiction from Arbordale Publishing.

She fulfilled her dream of publishing fiction for children with the *Definitely Dominguita* series. The series is about a Cuban American third grader who has modern day adventures while pretending to be characters in the classics her Abuela read to her as bedtime stories. The first book, *The Knight of the Cape* was named Best Books of 2021 by both School Library Journal, Kirkus, Nerdies, and Parents Latina. Winner of the Septima P. Clark Book Award for 2023, her biography in verse—*Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist* chronicles the life of the woman who was a pivotal force behind both the civil rights and the women's rights movements. With *The Little House of Hope*, a Junior Library Guild Selection, Best Books of 2022 from the Chicago and New York Public Libraries as well as Bank Street College Best Children's Book, Jennings portrays her immigrant experience in the hopes of showing our common humanity and emphasizing how a helping hand in a new land can make a life-saving difference for a family. Terry is delighted that *The Little House* was illustrated by Pura Belpré medalist, Raúl Colón, who captured her father's image without ever seen a picture.

Now, in *Our World Cuba*, Jennings is delighted to have had the opportunity to revisit her childhood experiences in her beloved island—from rowing trips with her father on Saturdays, to playing in the sand at the beach, to eating her favorite foods—including eating anones and spitting out the seeds. With this beautiful board book, Terry again encourages us all to embrace our common humanity and sings the praises of Cuban food. She lives in Reston, Virginia with her husband, and enjoys visiting with her five grandchildren, often encouraging them to bring their parents along. She is a member of SCBWI, Las Musas Latinx Collaborative and the Children's Book Guild of Washington, DC. Terry is represented by Natalie Lakosil of Looking Glass Literary and Media Management.

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**Credit Lou Jennings**

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT WRITING THE BOOK**

**What a chance to write a book about the joy of my island, and what a gift to have Marla Cruz Linares bring it to life.**

**Writing this book allowed me to revisit the childhood that was changed by our exile. I was able to think back to trips with my father, in little rented row boats, from el Nautico, a beach club, to Miramar. The water was so crystal clear as we got to Miramar that we could see sea urchins on the sand, it seemed like a long ways away. Definitely we would have to dive to touch them. Not that we wanted to. Those were times when he and I got to talk (if you could call it that—he was a man of few words) about everything that needed talking. I remember how delighted I was when I was finally allowed to take one oar, and then two. I remembered climbing mamey trees at my aunt's farm and pulling down the tough skinned football shaped fruits, climbing down to cut them in half, and then climbing back with a spoon to eat the creamy coral colored flesh. I also remember playing kitchen with avocados that grew in my backyard and using hibiscus leaves for steaks.**

**I have never been able to return to Cuba, but one thing I have read that makes me very happy is that the waters are as clear now as they were then.**

**I hope with this sweet book, many littles see other toddlers in a different culture, but yet, so much the same.**

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**

### **When did you become interested in writing?**

I've wanted to write since I was a young child. I wanted to be like Jo March, in Little Women. I even lived in a house with an attic for about a year and went up to the attic to write. I wrote a few very forgettable stories as a young girl. But in eleventh grade, my English teacher singled me out in front of the class for writing words she "knew" could not be part of my vocabulary in an assigned essay. She accused me of using the Thesaurus because I was Cuban. I hadn't, and I was humiliated. I had signed up for her creative writing class my senior year to try to figure out if I should, indeed, try to become a writer. I took myself out of that class. I eventually decided to major in Math in college. My math teacher, Mrs. Vaughan, had always been supportive and she believed in me. I ended up attending her Alma Mater, the University of Richmond.

It is also important to understand that my parents would not have approved of an occupation as insecure as writing. The combination of those two things steered me toward a more secure career, but stories never stopped rolling around in my head. When my children were of an age when their schools no longer needed me as a volunteer, I decided to give writing a chance.

### **What sparks your creativity?**

What sparks my creativity is getting the idea of a character in a situation. I am often very creative while I am walking or riding my bike. Or working in the garden. I can work out dialogue and plot problems while I exercise. Our World Cuba was very easy to write since we are following a day in the life of a Cuban toddler.



## **How did your experience as a young immigrant shape your life and your writing?**

As a young person, when I first came to the United States, I experienced some subtle and some not so subtle forms of discrimination. Those experiences, while nothing like what we see now, were hurtful. Trying to avoid discrimination shaped all my choices in my early life. I decided to learn English as well as I possibly could, assimilate and lose my “Cubanness” in order to be accepted. That need not have happened. I believe I can speak eloquently in both English and Spanish on the need to impress readers with the humanity of each of us. On how at our core, we are all the same. How the sum of small, thoughtless acts can change the trajectory of a life—never mind the impact of the systemic racism that afflicts our society.

## **What is most rewarding and/or challenging about writing children’s books?**

The reward is connecting with a reader and making a difference. My hope is to reach children and cement the belief that there are no “others.” That we are all the same—human beings. The protagonists of my chapter book series, Dominguita and Cami Campos, are every child. Whether they are American, Cuban or the descendant of a purple popsicle, they love their families, love sweets, have moments of brilliance and moments of sheer folly. Sometimes they’re good, sometimes not so good. Sometimes they get in trouble. And then they try to manipulate their way out of the mess. My protagonists are just as human as any of their readers. They are kids who happen to live in a household where black beans and rice with a side of plantains are a staple. I love having such an amazing forum to share their fun stories.

From a craft standpoint I love seeing a story take shape and finally say exactly what I meant it to say. I love writing so much, that I see very few challenges. I have learned so much, but still I am learning.

## **When did you first realize that you were not thought of as equal to Americans?**

I became a very good friend of the daughter of a Girl Scout leader when I first came to the United States. She invited me to join the troop. On our first camp out, I expected to share her tent. Instead, an African American girl and I were put in a tent by ourselves, while all the other ten girls slept in two six-person tents. It became clear to us both that we were considered "other" and less than the rest of the troop.

## **Why did your family come to the United States?**

An autocrat, Fidel Castro, was allowed to take power over the government of Cuba on January 1, 1959. Soon after taking power, he allowed no dissent, freedom of speech, or freedom of religion. He wrecked Cuba's economy and became a puppet of the Soviet Union. At first, my father was not allowed to leave the country because he worked for the Cuban equivalent of the Federal Reserve System, but in April of 1961, he was jailed during the Bay of Pigs invasion. People yelled for him to be executed by firing squad behind our house for the two nights he was in jail. Luckily, he was freed by Ché Guevara after three days. We came to the United States soon after that with \$50 for our whole family to begin a new life. We lived with one uncle for a while and a second uncle for a while longer. We were one of those families who lived twelve or fourteen people in the same house. My father finally found a job at the Richmond Federal Reserve Bank two years after we reached the United States. It was not at all at the level at which he worked in Cuba, but it allowed our family to thrive.

## **What was the favorite line you wrote?**

I love the spread with creamy mameyes and bumpy anodes.

“We always spit out the anon seeds.”

## **Were you a reader?**

Learning to read in Spanish is not difficult. It is totally phonetic and there are only 27 or 28 sounds (don't hold me to that, but it's a very small number). I learned to read when I was three. My mother was sewing on her pedal sewing machine and I would ask her the sounds of the letters on the bubbles in the Sunday comics (Cuban). I remember that vividly. I read for myself from that point on, often staying under the covers with a flashlight to read. As I got older, my father, who was a banker, gave me an allowance. I can't remember how much it was. The only thing I had to do to earn it was to keep an account of what I spent on a green accountant's sheet. It was easy. Every Saturday I spent \$0.25 for the movies and \$0.05 for a Sugar Daddy which lasted the whole movie. The rest I spent on books. There was a book kiosk about two blocks from my house and I would go on author binges. The owner of the bookstore often ordered the books that I wanted. It was easy to keep track of that.

Once Castro came and things got bad, my mother decided to quit work. She was a professor at a teacher's college, and she really couldn't NOT work. So, she volunteered at my school. I was reading so much that she convinced the Mother Superior at my school to tell me that I should stop reading. Mother Superior told me Jules Verne had been excommunicated and I shouldn't read him. Hmmm. It didn't work.

## **What do you believe is the best thing about your book (and what do you think makes it a “must” for people to buy)?**

It's not just my book, it's the whole series. We show toddlers in different countries going about their day. I've said it before, above, but it's so great that even the littlest readers/listeners can see that while the different cultures vary, we still are very much alike.

## **Do you have any advice for teachers or parents or other group on using this book to create empathy for immigrants?**

These books lend themselves to “compare and contrast” exercises. What is the character in the book doing? How are they doing it? Is that something you do at home? How do you do it? You may not have tostadas con cafe con leche for breakfast, but you'll have cereal. You may not eat mameyes for snacks but you may eat apples. Most of us start the day with a kiss from our loved ones.

## **Tell us About Marla Cruz Linares' Illustrations**

They are just so cute. There is no other way to say it. I want to get to know that kid who's spitting out anón seeds. She is a character and a half. Marla modeled her after her sister. Her love for Cuba and her love for her sister both shine in Our World Cuba.

## **OTHER PUBLISHED WORK:**

**The Little House of Hope (2022), picture book, Holiday House/Neal Porter Books**

**Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist (2022), Biography in verse, Little Bee Books (Septima P. Clark Award, 2023)**

**The Definitely Dominguita Series (2021) Chapter Book Series, Aladdin / Simon and Schuster**

**The Knight of the Cape (SLJ, Kirkus, Nerdies, and Parents Latina Best Books of 2021**

**Captain Dom's Treasure**

**All For One**

**Sherlock Dom**

**Aladdin / Simon and Schuster**

**Hydroelectric Power (2018), Non-fiction, ABDO Publishing**

**Vivian and the Legend of the Hoodoos (2017) Narrative non-fiction picture book, Arbordale Publishing**

**Magnetic Magic (2016) Narrative non-fiction picture book Arbordale Publishing, NSTA Recommended**

**Sounds of the Savanna (2015) Narrative non-fiction picture Book Arbordale Publishing (NSTA Recommended Bank Street Center for Children's Literature—Best Children's Book of the Year**

**Keystone to Reading Elementary Book Award List**

**The Women's Liberation Movement: 1960-1990 (2013)**

**Non-fiction**

**Mason Crest**

**ALA's Amelia Bloomer Project Recommended Feminist Literature 2014-2015**

**Gopher to the Rescue! A Volcano Recovery Story (2012)**

**Narrative non-fiction picture book**

**Sylvan Dell Publishers (Now Arbordale Publishing)**

**2013 Outstanding Science Trade Book – National Science Teacher's Association (NSTA) and Children's Book Council.**

**2013 New Books for Missouri Students**

**2014-2015 South Carolina Book Awards Program Selection**

**Educational Content for The Smithsonian Science Education Center and other educational publications.**

**Articles in The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, Long Island News Day.**

**Weekly humor column for The Reston Connection, in Reston, Virginia.**

**COMING FALL 2025, CAMI CAMPOS CHAPTER BOOK SERIES**