

Meg Medina

Female Speaker:

From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Roberto Salazar:

This is Roberto Salazar at the Library of Congress. Saturday, August 30th will mark the 14th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The Festival, which is free and open to the public, will hold evening hours for the first time ever this year in its new location, the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. Hours will be from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. For more details, visit www.loc.gov/bookfest.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce Meg Medina, whose latest book is titled "Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass." Meg Medina is an award-winning Cuban-American author who writes picture books, middle grade, and young adult fiction. Meg's work examines how cultures intersect through the eyes of young people, and she brings to audiences stories that speak to both what is unique in Latino culture, and to the qualities that are universal. Thank you so much for joining us, Meg.

Meg Medina:

Oh, it's my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Roberto Salazar:

In your book "Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass," you tell the story of a Latina teen, who is targeted by a bully. Talk about a provocative title. What inspired you to write this book?

Meg Medina:

Well, unfortunately, I had a similar experience myself in middle school, and it was such a lasting experience, and such a damaging one. When I look back on it, I really think it was a turning point for me. And so I was invited originally to write a story in an anthology about Latinas at a turning point, and although the anthology never came to fruition, it was, you know, the editor moved on to another publishing house, and so on, the germ of that story, the genesis, was there. And so I worked with my editor at Candlewick and I turned it into a novel, I think, because it is such a timely topic right now. We see so many reports of bullying going on in schools, and it was such an enormous experience in my own life that I really just wanted to give voice to what it's like to find yourself targeted relentlessly. But more importantly, I really wanted to write a story about regrouping, finding yourself in a hole and really in a serious situation, but figuring out how to be resilient, and how to survive it.

Roberto Salazar:

The book is a great read, and I noticed that the story is devoid of male characters for the most part. Why is that?

Meg Medina:

[laughs] Well, I love to write strong women. I was raised by strong Latinas, my mother, my tías, my grandmother. I really don't know any other kind of Latina, really. And I'm very interested in strong girls. A lot of my work professionally features the voice of girls, who are really concerned about many things, other than being, let's say, someone's boyfriend, et cetera. I'm really interested in exploring the life of girls. And so in this novel, I give Piddy a strong mom, who does care about her; I give her Lila, a neighbor who, you know, is very street smart, and gives her good advice; and I just give her a neighborhood filled with women at different points in their life with different skills that she can draw from.

Roberto Salazar:

What's been the response to the book so far?

Meg Medina:

Well, it's been really such a great journey with this book. When you write a book, it's such a private act, right? It's you, and your computer, and your story, and some days I wrote this book completely white knuckled, because I was remembering things I had really put in the past, and didn't want to think about very much. But almost immediately, when a book is published and you send it out into the world, it becomes other people's book, because they come to it with their experience. And so one of the most gratifying things for me is the connection that it has made with young women, with kids who are bullied, in some cases with the bullies themselves, and it never fails to happen when I'm at an event, at the end of the event, someone always stays behind, and they come and visit me, and they tell me "I had a Yaqui Delgado in my life, and this is what she did to me" or "This is what he did to me." And what is always - - what always strikes me about that is that you can see that the pain is still palpable in the person. Yes, they've gotten past it, they're adults, they have successful lives, but they remember that moment when someone was trying to get at their sense of who they were, and their self-worth.

So, the book won the Pura Belpré. It's a -- it got on the commended list for Las Americas, and it's gotten on a really diverse group of lists, like books for reluctant readers, books for adjudicated youth, best books for young adults. It's been so rewarding to see that this really personal and scary experience yielded this kind of fruit in the end.

Roberto Salazar:

Very well received. "Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass." Obviously I like saying that title. Your --

[laughter]

Meg Medina:

Good, because it's gotten me in a lot of trouble from time to time.

Roberto Salazar:

Your other books, "The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind" --

Meg Medina:

Yeah.

Roberto Salazar:

-- and "Milagros, Girl From Away," which one of these do you connect most with?

Meg Medina:

Oh, you know, asking an author that is like asking them to pick their favorite child. It's virtually impossible. I love "The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind," especially now that we're looking at this humanitarian crisis on the border with unaccompanied minors, because that book, although it's magical realism, although I write it sort of as a mix of telenovela, and magical realism, and social justice, really -- it's a strange mix of things together -- it's really about why people migrate, why people move. And so I have a tender spot for that, because it really looks at that issue, and I hope it gives people a way to talk about it without all the political, you know, drama that happens as soon as we talk about the border or immigration.

But with "Milagros," what I love about that book is that it was my first book, and it is the book that I really relied on the family stories of my grandmothers, of my tías, of their lives in Cuba. I really used those in the novel. And it's a book about a girl trying to find home, and I think that anyone who comes to this country is really seeking that question.

Roberto Salazar:

So what does Meg Medina do when she's not writing?

Meg Medina:

Oh, Meg Medina's busy. Meg Medina this week, for example, I do Girls of Summer. It's a curated reading list that I do with author Gigi Amateau, and we pick between 18 and 20 books for strong girls, from picture books all the way to YA. And you can find that at www.girlsofsummerlist.wordpress.com. And we feature the books that really talk about a girl's journey. Every Friday, we invite one of the authors to do a Q and A with us. And this week, for example, we do a live kickoff event, and usually about 200 librarians and mothers and girls, and just booklovers, show up at the public library. It's like a rock concert around books for kids, which is a beautiful thing to do, and in my mind, just a good use of my time as an author in my city.

Roberto Salazar:

We've been hearing from author Meg Medina, who will appear on Saturday, August 30th in the Teens Pavilion at the National Book Festival in the Washington Convention Center. Ms. Medina, thank you.

Meg Medina:

Oh, it's a pleasure. Thank you.

Female Speaker:

This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov. --

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