

REYNA GRANDE

"This book is a must read. . .
Let the divine spirits of Reyna's
characters become part of your life."
—Marta Moreno Vega, Ph.D.

Author of
Across a Hundred Mountains



DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES

A NOVEL



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PRESS MATERIALS

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American Book Award-Winning Author Reyna Grande's Second Novel

DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES

Available October 6, 2009

Interlocking Stories of Four Latinas Bound by Love of Folklórico Dance Hailed as a "Lyrical and Sensual Follow-up to *Across a Hundred Mountains*"

(Publisher's Weekly)

Dancing With Butterflies, Reyna Grande's much-anticipated follow-up to her award-winning debut novel **Across a Hundred Mountains**, tells the story of four unforgettable women who, despite their differences, are bound together by their Mexican roots and their love of Folklórico dance. Grande weaves their interlocking stories together, rendering their lives with startling emotional honesty. Grande, whose first novel captured both the American Book Award as well as the El Premio Aztlán Literary Award with its haunting tale of immigration and the quest for identity, has again spun a story of intimacy and timely import, against the vivid and sensuous backdrop of Ballet Folklórico. This time, a quartet of Mexican American women find themselves at various intersecting crossroads in life and love, with each of them destined to explore paths that bring them face-to-face with abuse, disillusionment, mid-life crisis and the search for self-acceptance. Ultimately, however, the four find that the common threads of their shared roots and their mutual passion for dance transcend their individual crises, strengthening their friendships.

Born in Guerrero, Mexico, Grande came to the U.S. at the age of nine as an undocumented immigrant to join her parents who had come seeking work and a better life for their family. Finding solace in the world of books and in writing, Grande became the first person in her family to receive a higher education, eventually earning her B.A. in Creative Writing and Film and Video from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Antioch University. A 2003 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow, she also teaches writing and is a highly sought-after public speaker. Her own experiences crossing the border and navigating her way between two cultures - the rural, impoverished one she left behind and the challenging, urban one she came to embrace in Los Angeles - have informed her storytelling in both thematic and narrative ways. As noted in the Kirkus Review of **Dancing With Butterflies**, Grande's absorbing and vivid prose, together with her considerable flair for the dramatic twist, "underscore the fierce humanity of these wise-Latinas-in-training."

DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES

Reyna Grande. Washington Square, \$16 paper (416p)
ISBN 978-1-4391-0906-9

REYNAGRANDE.COM

BIOGRAPHY

Originally from Guerrero, Mexico, Reyna Grande was two years old when her father left for the U.S. in search of work. Three years later, Reyna's mother followed her father north. Reyna and her siblings were left behind in Mexico in the care of their grandparents. In 1985, Reyna came to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant to join her father after an eight-year long separation. At the age of twelve she began writing short stories as a way to learn English faster and to hold on to her memories of the people she left behind in Mexico, but it wasn't until she entered her first year of college that Reyna began to take writing more seriously. Although she'd been an avid reader all through middle school and high school, Reyna had been reading books such as *Sweet Valley High* and *The Baby Sitter's Club*, books that didn't reflect her own experiences.



In 1994, she met an English professor at Pasadena City College who gave Reyna books written by Latina authors: *The Moths* by Helena Maria Viramontes, *The House On Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, among others. After having been exposed to Latino Literature, Reyna decided to get serious about her writing.

She began writing her first novel, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, in 1998 when she was a junior at UC, Santa Cruz. In 1999, Reyna obtained her B.A. in Creative Writing, becoming the first person in her family to graduate from college. In 2003, when she was back in Los Angeles, Reyna one of the eight fellows in the "Emerging Voices Rosenthal Fellowship" offered by Pen USA-West, where she continued to work on *Across a Hundred Mountains*.

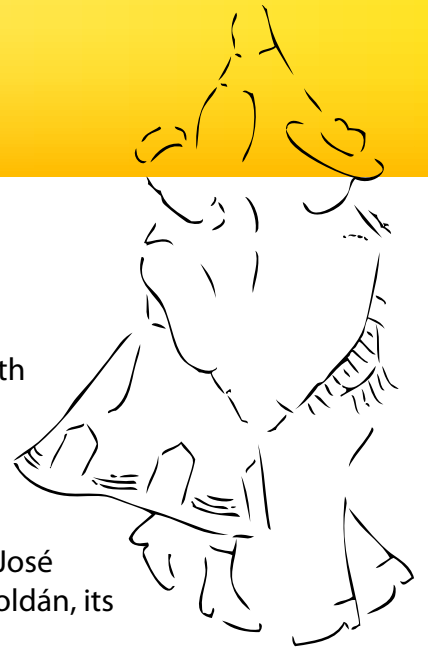
In 2006, *Across a Hundred Mountains* was published to critical acclaim, garnishing a starred review from *Publisher's Weekly*. *People Magazine* said of her novel, "It is a timely and riveting read." The book won a prestigious American Book Award (2007) and the El Premio Aztlan Literary Award (2006). It has become required reading at high schools, colleges, and universities throughout the nation.

Since the publication of her novel, Reyna has been actively reaching out to the Latino community. She travels around the country to speak at schools about the importance of higher education and pursuing one's dreams.

In 2008, Reyna received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Antioch University. Her second novel, *Dancing with Butterflies*, will be published in October 2009 by Washington Square Press. She teaches writing workshops and helps to organize the Los Angeles Latino Book & Family Festival. She is currently at work on a memoir.



a
CONVERSATION
with reyna grande



1. Exquisite details about Folklórico appear throughout Dancing with Butterflies, from specific dances to the challenges of directing a group. How did you research Folklórico?

Researching Folklórico was one of the hardest things about writing *Dancing with Butterflies*. The public library had shelves upon shelves of books written about ballet and other popular dances here in the United States, but there were only three booklets about Folklórico, and they weren't much help. They were about how to choreograph a dance, but they didn't contain specific historical details about Folklórico. At first, the two biggest sources for me were José Vences, artistic director of Grandeza Mexicana Folk Ballet Company, and Elías Roldán, its costume designer. Mr. Vences spent hours with me talking about the history of the dances, his experiences of starting his own dance group, and the trials and tribulations of running the group. He was also kind enough to read the 500-page manuscript and point out things that only a dance director would know. (This was very helpful in developing Yesenia.) Mr. Roldán shared his passion and knowledge of Folklórico costume-making, and I especially loved talking about cloth with him.

Books about Folklórico just aren't available in the U.S., but very late in the writing process, I was lucky to get my hands on three books that helped me. The first is a self-published book called *La Danza y el Traje en Mexico*, written by Dr. María Guadalupe Castro y Páramo, created especially for the Danzantes Unidos Festival which I attended in February 2009 in San Jose, California, a month before the final draft of this book was due! In June I got my hands on an anthology called *Dancing Across Borders*, published in May 2009 by University of Illinois Press. One of the contributors (and an editor) of the anthology was Olga Nájera-Ramírez, my Folklórico teacher at University of California, Santa Cruz. The third is a book called *Music and Dance of México* that a Folklórico teacher, Andrés de la Garza, wrote but hasn't yet been able to publish. He was kind enough to share it with me.

2. Four distinct voices lead us through Dancing with Butterflies: each woman has her own, unique style of narrating. Please tell us about the experience of writing from four different points of view. How did you develop their separate voices? Was one narrator harder to envision than the others?

My first book, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, is told from two points of view. It gave me the training I needed to tackle four different characters. I used the same techniques I had learned in that book—pay attention to the voice, the way the characters talk, the way they see the world around them. I also worked on each character individually, spent a lot of time trying to get to know each woman, without the distraction of the other three. Having said that, writing from four points of view was a lot harder than I imagined! I think for my next book I will try just one. The hardest character for me was Yesenia. Since she's ten years older than I am and is going through a different stage in her life, I was having a difficult time getting into her head. I ended up using my older sister as a model for Yesenia, and sometimes, when I was stuck, I would call my sister and say, "So tell me again about the time you . . ." Adriana was the easiest for me because I understood her. I grew up with an alcoholic father who physically abused me for many years, and later on, in my twenties, I too was looking for men who were like my father (not physically abusive, but controlling). Luckily I escaped those relationships and got over that very fast, and I found a wonderful man (like Ben!) to marry.

3. Each chapter opens with one of your graceful line drawings of Folklórico dancers. Why did you choose to include these drawings? Have you ever felt you had to choose between two art forms, as Adriana struggles to choose between dancing and ranchero singing?

The drawings came very late in the process, right before I turned in the final draft. I had thought about it for a long time. Because I was writing about such a visual topic- Folklórico-I felt that the drawings would complement the story. I couldn't find someone to do them, and I didn't feel confident enough to do them myself. But one day I said, why not? Why not at least try? So finally I decided to do them myself, just to see. And I ended up liking them enough, and when I showed them to my editor she liked them, too. Like Adriana, I felt torn between the passions I had. I loved music and from seventh grade up until my first year of college, I was a member of the marching band (I marched in the Rose Parade three times). From middle school to college, I took drawing and painting classes because I loved doing that, too. I also started writing when I was thirteen years old. At UC, Santa Cruz, I met a teacher who once told me that even though it was a good thing that I had many passions (I was also doing film and dancing at the time I met her), I needed to choose one thing that I really loved, above all others, so that I could focus on it and be great at it. Otherwise, as the saying goes, I would just be a jack-of-alltrades. So I chose writing. I'm glad I listened to her, because otherwise I wouldn't have been able to complete my first novel, which required a lot of discipline and commitment. Once in a while I still dance Folklórico and I still draw. Having my drawings included in *Dancing with Butterflies* was, what can I say, extremely fulfilling-to see two of my passions come together, at last.



4. Sibling rivalry is a prominent theme in the novel, with Elena and Adriana's constant conflict, as well as Soledad and Stephanie's less explosive rivalry. Why did you focus on siblings in this novel?

How can you write about siblings and not have rivalry thrown in the mix? I have four siblings, and there is always some drama going on. The only time we are drama free is when we avoid each other! The rivalry between Elena and Adriana was inspired by my relationship with my older sister-not the way our relationship is, but how it could have been if things had turned out differently. Like Adriana, my older sister left me in a hellhole-my alcoholic father's home. She didn't take me with her when she left, and the two years I was at my father's without my sister were two of the worst years of my life. To this day my sister apologizes for not taking me with her. I forgive my sister. But Adriana isn't as forgiving. When I wrote about Adriana and Elena, I asked myself: how would my relationship with my sister be if I had held a grudge and not forgiven or understood my sister's choices? (She was only twenty-one and could barely take care of herself, but at the time all I thought about was that she had left me and saved herself.) With Soledad and Stephanie, I wanted to write about siblings who belong to two worlds. Most immigrant families have siblings who were born in this country and others born in other countries. Even in my own family, my two youngest siblings were born here, but the three oldest (myself included) were born in Mexico.

5. Soledad faces enormous challenges in her efforts to cross the México-U.S. border. What inspired Soledad's story?

Soledad was the last character to make an appearance. One day when I was at Mr. Vences's house (the director of the dance group I researched), Elías Roldán was there, showing Mr. Vences a costume he was designing for the group. As I watched them talk about the costume and what changes needed to be made, I realized that I was missing a crucial part in my novel—the point of view of Alegría's costume designer! Mr. Roldán was very generous with his time, and I visited him at his house to interview him several times. Like Soledad, he used his dining room to do his sewing, and every corner of the living room and dining room was covered in bolts of cloth. In the interviews he not only talked about costumemaking and cloth, but he shared with me his dream of having his own shop and everything that was keeping him from making his dream come true. But now I'm happy to say that Mr. Roldán has his own shop in East L.A., and his business is thriving. Although *Dancing with Butterflies* ends before Soledad makes her dream come true, this is the kind of future I envision for her. In terms of the challenges she faced crossing the border, it was inspired by all the stories I hear from immigrants who have had to make the dangerous journey north (myself included).

6. Despite all the challenges that your characters face, there are many light-hearted moments as well. How did you manage to balance serious subjects and humor? Do you have a favorite humorous moment in the novel?

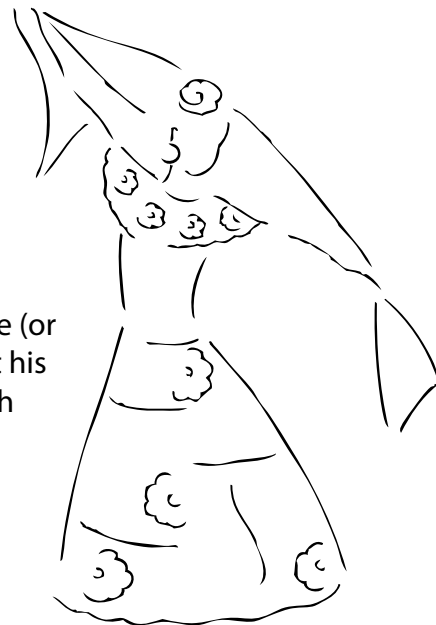
I tend to write depressing stuff, and writing funny isn't my strength. Whatever funny moments appear in the novel were not planned. But a little humor goes a long way, and it gives the reader a break from all that sadness, so I'm glad I managed to have a few funny moments here and there. One of my favorite humorous moments is when Adriana and Ben go out for sushi and she mistakes the wasabi for guacamole. I was twenty years old when I first had sushi, and like Adriana, I was very ignorant about what wasabi was. I put a lot of it on my sushi, and, boy, did that hurt!

7. Frida Kahlo is featured prominently in the novel, as Adriana's favorite artist. How does Kahlo's work affect you?

Frida Kahlo is an inspiration to many Latinas. She was a fighter. For most of her life she was in deep physical (and emotional) pain. Yet her passion for art helped carry her through the toughest moments of her life. Writing has been my salvation. When things got bad at home, I wrote. Writing kept me sane. Kahlo painted herself many times. When I write I use myself as the starting point for my characters. Elena, Adriana, Soledad, Yesenia, they are all facets of me. They are not selfportraits, no, not like Kahlo painted her self-portraits. My selfportraits (my characters) are drawn in a style like Picasso's, very distorted, but somehow recognizable. Like Adriana, my favorite Kahlo painting is "The Two Fridas." When I lived with my father, I developed a second personality, another Reyna, so to speak. One Reyna was afraid, depressed, and lonely. But the other Reyna was strong, brave, and smart. When things got tough, that second Reyna was the one who would give me the push I needed to keep going. I could hear her in my head telling me, "Things won't always be like this. One day they will be better." When I saw "The Two Fridas," I saw my dual personality represented in that painting, and I fell in love with the painting and with the woman who painted it.

8. Although the main characters in Dancing with Butterflies are Mexican or Mexican-American, they face many of the same problems as women from other backgrounds and cultures. Which of the characters' challenges do you feel are the most universal? Which feel more culturally specific to you?

Just a few weeks ago, my older brother asked me why I don't write books without Latino characters or themes. He said that I am "limiting my audience" and therefore (or so I read between the lines) I will never have a bestseller. At first I felt furious about his comment, especially because I was showing him the advance copy of *Dancing with Butterflies* and instead of just saying, "Good job, Reyna," he asks me that question! (Sibling drama? Yes!) But the thing is that even though I write about Latino characters, ultimately I am writing about human beings. No matter what ethnic background we come from, first and foremost we belong to the human race. The problems the women in *Dancing with Butterflies* face are universal. Like Yesenia, who hasn't thought about aging and being frightened by it? Who hasn't thought about the body's limitations and what it can and cannot do as we get older? Elena gave birth to a stillborn baby. What mother, at some point during a pregnancy, hasn't feared the worst? And for some, no matter their ethnic backgrounds, the worst has come to pass. What culture hasn't had sibling rivalry, dead relatives to mourn, dreams that haven't come true, obstacles to overcome, marriages that fail, illicit love affairs, forbidden love?



9. At one point, Elena realizes that her ex-husband never understood her passion for dancing. Do you think artists need to connect with other artists in order to share their passions?

I think that it is very hard for nonartists to understand an artist's inner world, needs, and thoughts. But it doesn't mean you can't try! I think it is very important for artists to build friendships with other artists. I have been lucky to have made many writer friends, especially female writers. We get together sometimes for coffee, or communicate through email or phone calls. We critique each other's works, talk about our goals, our dreams, our troubles with our respective partners, our children, our editors, our publishers, our readers. I think that artists need to have a support network and spend time with those who understand, those who are walking the same difficult path. I have made it a point to reach out to other writers. For example, this year I am helping to organize the Latino Book & Family Festival in Los Angeles to reach out to other writers and have us come together, for at least one weekend, to share our passion for the written word, not only with each other but with the community. I love my writer friends. They understand me in a way my own family never will.

10. Your first novel, Across a Hundred Mountains, also centers on immigration and families. Do you plan to continue these themes in your future work?

I like to write about things that are important to me. My older sister once asked, "Why are you always writing about Mexico?" My father once said, "Why don't you just forget about the past and move on? Why do you need to write about it?" I write about things that I care about, that matter to me. The immigrant experience is one of them. Right now, I am working on a memoir, in which I write about my childhood in Mexico, living in poverty, being raised by my grandmother because my parents were here in the United States working. I write about what it was like to come here as an illegal immigrant and the difficulties of trying to close the gap created by eight years of separation between me and my father. So to answer the question, yes, I do plan to continue writing about immigration and families, among other things. I am always looking for new ideas and topics. One has to grow as a writer, and one way to do that is to take chances and try new things.

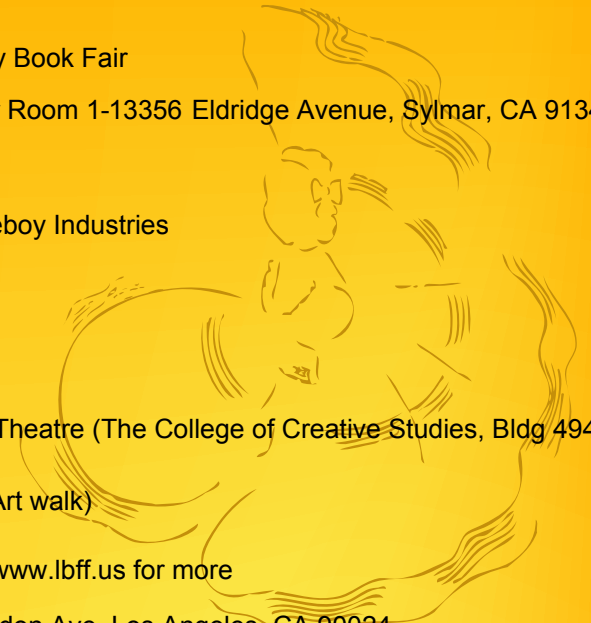
SCHEDULE OF LIVE EVENTS

DATE/TIME

Tuesday, September 29 12:45-2:10 pm
Wednesday, September 30 12:00-1:30
Thursday, October 1 11:30 am
Saturday October 3 4-5:30pm
Sunday, October 4 Time: TBA
Tuesday, October 6 6:30 pm
Wednesday, October 7 4:00-5:00 pm
Thursday, October 8 6:00-9:00 pm
October 10-11 Time: TBA
Wednesday, October 14 6:30 pm
Thursday, October 15 7:30 pm
October, 16 Time: TBA
Sunday, October 18 2:30 pm
October 20 4:30 pm
October 21 & 22 Time: TBA
Thursday, October, 22 6:30 pm
Friday, October 23 6:30 pm
Saturday, October 24 3:00 pm
Sunday, November 1 2:30 pm
Thursday, November 5 Time: TBA
Thursday, November 5 6:00 pm
Saturday, November, 7 2:00 pm
November 9, 6:30 pm
Thursday, November. 12 Time: TBA
Saturday November. 14 Time: TBA
Sunday, November. 15 5:30 pm
Thursday, November, 19 6:30 pm
Saturday, Nov. 21 2:00 pm
December TBA

LOCATION

City College Campus, San Diego City Book Fair
L.A Mission College, Campus Center Room 1-13356 Eldridge Avenue, Sylmar, CA 91342.
Cal State University Dominguez Hills
Fundraiser/Publication party at Homeboy Industries
West Hollywood Book Fair
Vroman's Bookstore Pasadena, CA
Book Reading UCSB: The Old Little Theatre (The College of Creative Studies, Bldg 494)
Mundo Maya/Galleria Mijares (L.A. Art walk)
Latino Book & Family Festival visit www.lbff.us for more
Westwood Branch Library 1246 Glendon Ave. Los Angeles, CA 90024
Tattered Cover Bookstore Reading 9315 Dorchester St, Highlands Ranch, CO 80129
Keynote Speaker at Adelante Mujer Latina Youth Conference-Laramie, WY
Poway Branch Library 13137 Poway Rd Poway, CA 92064
Presentation Cal State L.A. Univ. Student Union, 5154 State University Dr. L.A, CA 90032
(San Gabriel Room/3rd floor)
Bakersfield College (official visiting author)
Dancing with Butterflies Reading Barnes & Noble, 4001 California Ave. Bakersfield, CA 93309
Grupo Sabor de Mexico dance studio, 22111 South Vermont Ave. Torrance, CA 90502
Borders 7000 Marketplace Ave, Goleta, CA 93117
Gallery Chim Maya, East L.A.
Philadelphia Public Library (Teen Series program)
Barnes & Noble, 1805 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA 19103
Dancing with Butterflies Reading
El Museo Del Barrio (at the cafe), 1230 Fifth Ave (at 104th St.). New York, NY 10029
Barnes & Noble San Pedro Crossing 321 NW Loop 410, #104 San Antonio, TX 78216
La Posada Shelter Fundraiser, El Paso, TX
Puente Project 4th annual conference- Santa Cruz, CA
Capitola Book Café Capitola, CA
Echo Park Branch Library 1410 W. Temple St. Los Angeles, CA 90026
National Hispanic Cultural Center, Albuquerque, NM
Racine County Public Library, Racine WI



praise for
DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES

"Grande's lyrical and sensual follow-up to her stunning *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) is well worth the wait. This time out, there is still the poignant intimacy of the Mexican immigrant experience, but it's richly layered into the lives of four women who discover that their passion for the vibrant tradition of Folklorico dancing binds them to their pasts, futures, and one another as each faces her own test of love and loyalty." ~ Publisher's Weekly, STARRED Review

" Four Los Angelenas connected to the vibrant world of Mexican Folklorico dance tell their stories. Their troupe, *Alegría*, dances to mariachi music, performing indigenous forms ranging from Aztec tribal steps to German-influenced polkas. After an arthritic knee ends her performing career, *Alegría*'s founder and star Yesenia undergoes a midlife crisis that threatens her marriage. Husband Eduardo begins to unravel when Yesenia radically alters her plump form with cut-rate plastic surgery in Tijuana (not so cut-rate that she doesn't have to embezzle from *Alegría* to pay for it). Soledad, *Alegría*'s talented costume designer, is troubled by her lack of citizenship, her disfiguring birthmark and her younger half sister Stephanie, who receives a large malpractice settlement. Elena, 36 weeks pregnant, learns that her fetus's heart has stopped beating; after delivering her dead baby, she no longer has the spirit to dance with *Alegría* or to preserve her one-year marriage. Adriana, Elena's younger sister, has always resented her for causing their abusive father's arrest and conviction, then going away to school and leaving Adriana with their vindictive paternal grandparents. Also a performer with *Alegría*, party-girl Adriana takes up with bad-boy Emilio, the company's newest virtuoso, who beats her just as her father used to. Elena, who teaches high school in addition to dancing, is fighting her growing attraction to an earnest-and underage-student. When her grandmother's death requires Soledad to return to Michoacán, winter home to the mass-migrating Monarch butterflies who provide the novel's central motif (and title), all the story lines interact pleasingly and suspensefully as her friends plot Soledad's reentry into California. Absorbing arcana about butterflies and Folklorico traditions, descriptions of food way beyond burritos, not to mention an unflinching depiction of the immigration debacle's personal toll, underscore the fierce humanity of these wise-Latinas-in-training. ~Kirkus Review

Dancing with Butterflies is a fascinating braid of stories, masterfully woven, where four women take us on their intimate journeys of identity, womanhood and Mexican traditions.

-- Maria Amparo Escandon--Author of *Esperanza's Box of Saints* and *Gonzalez & Daughter Trucking Co.*

Just when you think you know all about friends, Grande comes along to teach you something else about love and its mysteries, about good conversation over beers, sacrifices one makes for family, and about the joys and sins of shoe-stomping pride.

--Helen Maria Viramontes author of *Their Dogs Came with Them*

Award-winning novelist Reyna Grande returns with a novel full of music, motion and heart. *Dancing With Butterflies* is about four women whose stories and friendships are as rich as the Folklorico dance that brought them together. Grande is a novelist to watch.

--Tanarive Due, American Book Award-winning author of *Blood Colony*

