



# REYNA GRANDE

FROM UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT TO AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

**Reyna Grande** is the author of three critically acclaimed books. **THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US**, Grande's memoir about her life before and after illegally immigrating from Mexico to the United States, was published by Atria Books on August 28, 2012. A finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, it was hailed by the L.A. Times as 'the *Angela's Ashes* of the modern Mexican immigrant experience.'



Grande's first novel, *Across a Hundred Mountains* (Atria 2006), received a 2007 American Book Award, and the 2006 *El Premio Aztlán* Literary Award. Her second novel, *Dancing with Butterflies* (Washington Square Press 2009) was the recipient of a 2010 International Latino Book Awards. All three books have been read widely in schools across the country and have been very popular with book clubs. *Across a Hundred Mountains* and *Dancing with Butterflies* have also been published internationally.

Born in Mexico, Reyna was two years old when her father left for the U.S. to find work. Her mother followed her father north two years later, leaving Reyna and her siblings behind in Mexico. In 1985, when Reyna was going on ten, she entered the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant to live with her father. She went on to become the first person in her family to graduate from college. Reyna holds a B.A. in creative writing and film & video from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She received her M.F.A. in creative writing from Antioch University.

Reyna Grande teaches creative writing for UCLA Extension and speaks at high schools, colleges, and universities across the nation.

[ReynaGrande.Com](http://ReynaGrande.Com)



# BOOKS

## The Distance Between Us

2014 One Maryland, One Book selection  
2014 One Book/One Community, University of Iowa  
2014 Books in Common Selection, Butte College & Chico State University  
2014 One Book/One Community, San Juan College  
2014 Santa Rosa Junior College Reads selection  
2013-14 Grand Valley State University Community Reading Project selection  
2014 Monroe County (MI) One Book/One City selection  
Cal State University, Los Angeles First Year Experience Selection 2014  
National Book Critics Circle Awards Finalist  
2012 Las Comadres National Book Club Selection

**"A brutally honest book... the "Angela's Ashes" of the modern Mexican immigrant experience." –LA Times**

**"I've been waiting for this book for decades." –Sandra Cisneros, author of *The House on Mango Street***

**"Grande captivates and inspires."—Publishers Weekly, STARRED Review**

**"Grande is a fierce, smart, shimmering light of a writer with an important story to tell." --Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail***

**THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US** (Atria Books; \$25.00; August 28, 2012) is Reyna Grande's personal, heart-wrenching, and ultimately triumphant memoir about her journey from Mexico to the United States as an undocumented child immigrant, where she learned that the separation between a parent and child can be measured as much in emotional distance and abandonment as it can be in miles. An engaging writer with a talent for infusing her narrative with personal and affecting characterizations and stories, Grande truly offers an unprecedented look into the immigration experience and the reality that millions of people are facing each day.

### **THE DISTANCE BETWEEN US: A Memoir**

**By Reyna Grande**

Published by: Washington Square Press

ISBN: 978-1451661781

Price: \$15.00 US

Pub Date: March 12, 2013

### **LA DISTANCIA ENTRE NOSOTROS**

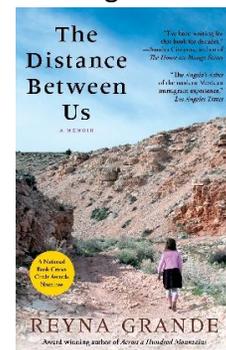
**Por Reyna Grande**

Atria Books

978-1476710402

\$15.00 US

April 16, 2013



**ReynaGrande.Com**



# Across a Hundred Mountains

**2010 Latino Books Into Movies Award**

**2007 American Book Award**

**2006 El Premio Aztlán Literary Award**

2013 Owensboro Community & Technical College Common Reading \* Aury Book Club (April selection) 2011 \* 2010 Bookshop Santa Cruz Book Club pick (May) \* 2010 San Mateo County Library "One Book/One Community" (Spanish) \* 2010 City of Watsonville "On the Same Page " (community read) \* 2009 Schoolcraft College Campus Read & Pageturners Book Club selection \* 2009 Teen Author Series, Free Library of Philadelphia \* 2008 Required Reading--Summer Bridge Program at Taft College \* 2007 Eastern Connecticut's "One Book/One Region" \* 2007 SummerTIME Read (USC) \* 2006 UCSC Freshmen Read (Kresge & Porter)

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**"Grande's spare, elegantly written tale...is a timely and riveting read."--People Magazine**

**"Grande's deft portraiture endows even the smallest characters with grace." — Publisher's Weekly, starred review**

**"An affecting debut on Mexican poverty, illegal immigration and cosmic injustice. " --Kirkus Reviews**

**"A breathtaking debut." --El Paso Times**

**ACROSS A HUNDRED MOUNTAINS** is a stunning and poignant story of migration, loss, and discovery. After a tragedy that separates her from her mother, Juana Garcia leaves her small town in Mexico to find her father who left his home and family two years before to find work in America, El Otro Lado, and rise above the oppressive poverty so many of his countrymen endure. Out of money and in need of someone to help her across the border, Juana meets Adelina Vasquez, a young woman who left her family in California to follow her lover to Mexico. Finding each other--in a Tijuana city jail--they offer each other much needed material and spiritual support and ultimately become linked in the most unexpected way. Using a non-linear narrative style, where the pieces don't fall into place until the very end, Grande takes readers inside the lives of the people of Mexico who are left behind in the phenomenon of migration to the United States.

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## **ACROSS A HUNDRED MOUNTAINS**

**By Reyna Grande**

Published by: Washington Square Press

ISBN: 978-0743269582

Price: \$15.00 US

Pub Date: May 15, 2007

## **A TRAVÉS DE CIEN MONTAÑAS**

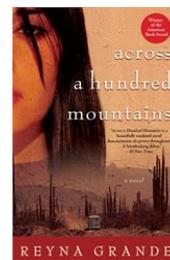
**Por Reyna Grande**

Atria Books

978-1416544746

\$15.00 US

May 15, 2007



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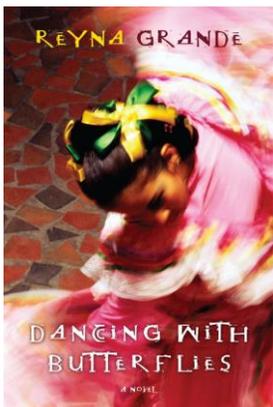
# Dancing With Butterflies

2010 International Latino Book Award  
2009 Las Comadres National Book Club Selection

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"Grande's lyrical and sensual follow-up to her stunning *Across a Hundred Mountains* (2006) is well worth the wait."—Publisher's Weekly, starred review

"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." -- Helena María Viramontes, author of *Their Dogs Came with Them*



**DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES** uses the alternating voices of four very different women in a Los Angeles dance company called *Alegría* to weave a story of friendship and love. Yesenia, who founded *Alegría*, finds herself unable to dance and seeks a miracle from a plastic surgeon in Tijuana. Elena, grief stricken by the death of her child and the end of her marriage, falls dangerously in love with one of her under-age students. Elena's sister Adriana, wears the wounds of abandonment by a dysfunctional family and becomes unable to discern love from abuse. Soledad, the sweet-tempered undocumented immigrant who designs costumes for *Alegría*, must make the dangerous journey north after she returns to Mexico to see her dying grandmother. Reyna Grande has succeeded in bringing the world of Folklorico dance to life, with characters whose stories are so gripping, the reader cannot help but cry along with their travails and

cheer their triumphs. Ajúa!!

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## DANCING WITH BUTTERFLIES

By Reyna Grande

Published by: Washington Square Press

ISBN: 978-1-4391-0906-9

Price: \$16.00 US

Pub Date: October 09, 2009

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## RECOGNITIONS

**El Premio Aztlan Literary Award 2006**

**American Book Award 2007**

**2010 International Latino Book Award**

**National Book Critics Circle Awards Finalist**

**2014 One Maryland, One Book**

**2014 One Community, One Book selection from the U of Iowa Center for Human Rights**

**2014 Santa Rosa Junior College Reads**

**2014 One Book, One Community-San Juan College**

**2014 Rolling Meadows High School Summer Reading Program**

**2014-15 "Book in Common," Butte College/Chico State University**

**Grand Valley State University "Common Reading" 2013**

**California State University-Los Angeles "First Year Experience" Selection 2014**

**Monroe County's One Book/One Community 2014**

**2007 "One Book/One Region", Eastern Connecticut**

**2010 On the Same Page (Community Read), City of Watsonville, CA**

**Ramona Convent Secondary School "One School/One Community" selection 2013-14**

**Owensboro Community & Technical College Common Reading Selection 2012**

**Las Comadres Para Las Americas Book Club Nov/2012**

**One of the Best Adult Books 4 Teens 2012 (School Library Journal)**

**One of the 15 Best Books of 2012 (The Christian Science Monitor)**

**2014 Author-in-Residence, Park City High School, UT**

**2012 Author-in-Residence, Pasadena City College, CA**

**2014 Keynote Speaker ~ MATSOL, (Boston, MA)**

**2014 Keynote Speaker, Borders of Diversity Conference, Pasadena City College, Pasadena, CA**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ CATESOL, (San Diego, CA)**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ Puente Motivational Conference, (San Francisco & Riverside, CA)**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ Comadres & Compadres Latino Writers Conference, (Brooklyn, NY)**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ Latino Recognition Ceremony, Pasadena City College, (Pasadena, CA)**

**2013 Cerro Visiting Author ~ Bakersfield College, Delano Campus, (Delano, CA)**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ Goostree Women's Symposium (Fort Worth, TX)**

**2013 Keynote Speaker ~ Latina History Day Conference, HOPE (Los Angeles, CA)**

**2013 Featured Speaker ~ California Association of Bilingual Education, (Long Beach, CA)**

**2012 Keynote Speaker ~ Texas Association of Bilingual Education (San Antonio, TX)**

**2012 Keynote Speaker ~ Leonardo Dorantes Lecture Series, Santa Barbara City College**



**2012 Writer-in-Residence ~ Pasadena City College (Pasadena, CA)**

**2012 Keynote Speaker ~ Latino Youth Summit (Kearney, Nebraska)**

**2010 Keynote Speaker ~ CMAA Scholarship Breakfast (Council of Mexican-American Administrators)**

**2010 Keynote Speaker ~ CABA (California Association of Bilingual Education)**

**2010 Nancy R. Chandler Visiting Scholar ~ Central Oregon Community College (Bend, OR)**

**2010 Keynote Speaker ~ PVUSD 4th Annual Parent Conference (Watsonville, CA)**

**2009 Keynote Speaker ~ Regional Family Conference, Migrant Education Region XVIII (Santa Maria, CA)**

**2009 Cerro Visiting Author ~ Bakersfield College (Bakersfield, CA)**

**2009 Keynote Speaker ~ Adelante Mujer Latina Youth Conference (Laramie County, WY)**

**2009 Commencement Speaker ~ CSUDH Dolores Huerta Graduation (Carson, CA)**

**2008 Commencement Speaker ~ Pasadena City College (Pasadena, CA)**

**2008 Keynote Speaker ~ SCTE Fall Conference (Southland Council of Teachers of English)**

**2007 Keynote Speaker ~ Conference of the Living Tree, Ventura, CA**

**2007 Keynote Speaker ~ ECCTYC Conference (English Council of California Two-Year Colleges)**

**2007 Highlighted author for LEAP (Learn, Experience, Achieve, and Persevere) ~ Butte College (Chico, CA)**







self-esteem. For a long time I didn't have a sense of self-worth, and it took me a long time to finally start to love myself and stop worrying about whether my parents loved me or not. But this experience also affected my ability to love.

I loved my parents unconditionally, and yet the way they constantly failed me affected my relationships with others.

**Q: As you wrote your memoir, did your thoughts about your parents change? Did your feelings toward them become more positive or negative?**

A: Writing the memoir helped me to understand my parents better. For a long time, I only saw my experience through my eyes. But I hardly ever thought about their own experiences, and the circumstances they found themselves in. The first draft of the memoir was very angry in tone, accusatory even. Both my parents came across as one-dimensional. I gave this first draft to a former teacher, and what he said to me was this. "Reyna, this memoir is one big grudge against your parents." And he was right.

The challenge for me was to remove all of the negative emotions that were coming across. I had to take a step back, look at my parents as "characters" in my book, and get to know them from the inside out. Just as I handled my fictional characters, where I knew everything about them—their fears, their aspirations, their past, their goals, etc.—that is how I needed to know my parents. I needed to give them their humanity. When I finished the memoir, I felt that at some level, I could finally understand my parents—and forgive them—and that was very healing for me.

**Q: Were you concerned about what your family would say or react to you writing this memoir?**

A: I knew my siblings would be okay with it. But I was actually terrified about what my parents would think, especially my father. There were many moments when I felt that I couldn't publish it. That I shouldn't publish it. Sometimes I felt like calling my agent and telling her to pull the plug. But then I would remind myself of why I was writing this story—I was doing it for those young people I wanted to inspire—and I would keep writing. Then my father passed away halfway through my writing of the memoir, and in his death I tried harder to make sure that the reader understood my father. That they knew, as I did, that he wasn't a bad man. He was a man with good intentions, but with too many demons haunting him.

**Q: Writing a memoir is considered difficult in that it's a balance between getting your own personal experience on paper, yet ensuring that essential writing techniques and skill are used. How did you manage to turn your life into a book?**

A: My former writing teacher, whom I mentioned earlier, told me that even though I was writing about my life, I was still writing a book—which is a work of art. I was making art. I found that idea to be daunting. But I was lucky to have two published novels under my belt. It took me at least three drafts before I was able to move past my emotions and break away from my "personal" self to start looking at the memoir through a writer's





eyes. I began to look at the “material” and thought about the narrative arc for each chapter and for the overall book. At first, the memoir felt like a bunch of memories that didn’t connect, so I worked hard to imbue each memory with meaning. I looked at my family as “characters” and worked on their development and making them three dimensional, the way I would have done if I were writing a novel. I interviewed my sisters, my brother, my parents the way I would have ‘interviewed’ my fictional characters to get to know them. As I got closer to finishing the book, I began to look at the themes in the book, the symbolisms, the metaphors, and I gave them more weight. At first, it was extremely difficult to write the memoir. It was too personal. Too raw. But when I put on my writer’s hat, I was able to move beyond the emotions and focus on what I was creating—literature. Art.

**Q: How is the storytelling process different in writing one's memoir versus writing a work of fiction?**

A: At first it was difficult for me to get a “handle” on writing nonfiction. I felt limited by the fact that I had to tell the truth and restrain my imagination. But then I discovered that it really isn’t that much different to write a memoir than to write a novel. Both novels and memoirs need the same thing—developed characters, a narrative arc, conflict, themes, setting, dialogue, etc. The only difference is that one is a product of your imagination and the other is a rendering of real events.

Then the challenge for me was how to look at the material (my life) and select the events that would tell a concise story with a narrative arc. I was covering about sixteen years of my life in 350 pages, so I had to work very hard on what to keep and what to leave out. It isn’t like that when I write novels. For the most part I create the plot points that are absolutely necessary for the story. But because I was writing about my own life, sixteen years of it to be exact, that was a lot of “footage” I had to look at and select.

**Q: What did you enjoy the most about writing *The Distance Between Us*?**

A: What I loved about writing this memoir is that I got to spend time with my older sister, Mago. It allowed me the opportunity to return to my childhood and to once again be her “Nena,” her baby. My sister and I aren’t as close as we used to be. We grew up. When I left for Santa Cruz to study, that was the point when our lives took different paths. I love my sister very much, and as I wrote the memoir, I was able to reconnect with her once again. At remembering everything that she did for me, how she nurtured me, took care of me, stood by me for all those years, I was able to look at our lives now and realize that even though we aren’t as close as we used to be, there will always be a special bond that connects us.

**Q: How do you see the relative role of poverty in the lives of immigrants? Do you see it as a motivation for advancing oneself and reaching for opportunities, or as a limitation to success? Or both?**





A: I think it's both. Living in poverty is a great test of endurance. For some people it is a motivating factor to look for opportunities to better oneself. But there are costs, too. My father left Mexico to pursue a better life for himself and his family, and look what it did to us--it broke up my family. But something good came of it, too. I wouldn't be where I am today if he hadn't made that choice. We paid the price, but I think I was able to make those sacrifices worthwhile. To me, all of my accomplishments give meaning to all that we lost.

**Q: How did discovering literature and writing give you a direction and a sense of identity in your new life in America?**

A: When I discovered books, I felt that I had been saved. My childhood was full of things that were beyond my control. Books gave me an escape. I was able to hide in the pages of those books and for a moment get away from all the chaos around me. Once I discovered Latino Literature when I was in college, the books I read helped me to define myself. I was Mexican and American. I could celebrate my Mexican culture while at the same time also feel at ease in the American culture. They helped me not to feel torn between the two.

**Q: Your memoir is very topical, especially given the political climate surrounding issues of immigration and the undocumented, in particular the young people in this country today facing the same issues you did as an undocumented immigrant. How do you see your role in relation to them?**

A: I do particularly feel a connection to the DREAMers, those young undocumented people who were brought to the U.S. by their parents when they were children. That was my own experience. I was brought here by my father when I was nine years old. Like me, many of the DREAMers were left behind by their parents in their native countries. Studies show that 80% of Latin American children in U.S. schools have been separated from a parent during the process of migration.

Just like the DREAMers, by coming to this country as a child, I speak English better than I speak my native tongue. All of my writing is done in English. I know my way in this American society more than I will ever know how to navigate myself in Mexico.

The only difference between me and the DREAMers is that I was able to legalize my status when I was 13 years old, whereas they have not been given that chance. If their story is anything like my story, I believe they have suffered enough to also continue to struggle because of their lack of legal status. I deeply believe it is time to end their suffering and for them to be allowed the chance that I was given—to give back to society and repay everything it has done for me.

**Q: Many would say that you are in a sense living the American Dream and that your story is, at its heart, an American story. Do you see it this way?**





A: I do see it that way. The American story is a story of triumph against all odds. I was born in a shack made of bamboo sticks and cardboard, on a dirt floor, delivered by a midwife. I was born into extreme poverty. The odds were not in my favor. Yet I have come a long way from my humble beginnings. The beauty of this country is that dreams can come true here. The journey is not all easy. But through hard work and dedication, and yes, also with luck and help from others, one can accomplish one's dreams. This is what America stands for—the land of opportunity. To some it is a cliché. But I deeply believe in what one can accomplish in this country with a lot of work and plenty of 'ganas.'





## Praise for *The Distance Between Us*

**"I've been waiting for this book for decades. The American story of the new millennium is the story of the Latino immigrant, yet how often has the story been told by the immigrant herself? What makes Grande's beautiful memoir all the more extraordinary is that, through this hero's journey, she speaks for millions of immigrants whose voices have gone unheard." —Sandra Cisneros, author of *The House of Mango Street***

**"Reyna Grande is a shimmering light of a writer with an important story to tell." —Cheryl Strayed, author of the New York Times bestseller *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail***

**"A brutally honest book... the *Angela's Ashes* of the modern Mexican immigrant experience." —*The L.A. Times***

**"Grande grabs your heart and strums music on it." —*The Dallas Morning News***

**"Grande captivates and inspires..." —*Publisher's Weekly***

**"A standout immigrant coming-of-age story." —*Kirkus Reviews***

**"Puts a human face on issues that stir vehement debate..." —*Booklist***

**"A visceral experience of poverty." —*The Christian Science Monitor***

**"Makes palpable a human dilemma and dares us to dismiss it." —*The California Report***

**"Grande is the kind of unsparing witness whose voice we don't hear enough." —*Slate Magazine***

**"Readers of *The Distance Between Us* will gain a deeper insight into immigration and also enjoy Grande's eloquent, honest storytelling. This book would be fabulous required reading for college freshmen or, even better, for freshman members of Congress." —*The Washington Independent Review of Books***

**"Her compelling story, told in unvarnished, resonant prose, is an important piece of America's immigrant history." —*BookPage***

**"Reyna Grande's extraordinary journey toward the American dream will be an inspiration for anyone who has ever dreamed of a better life." —Ligiah Villalobos, writer/executive producer of *Under the Same Moon/La Misma Luna***

**ReynaGrande.Com**





**“In this poignant memoir about her childhood in Mexico, Reyna Grande skillfully depicts another side of the immigrant experience—the hardships and heartbreaks of the children who are left behind. Through her brutally honest firsthand account of growing up in Mexico without her parents, Grande sheds light on the often overlooked consequence of immigration—the disintegration of a family.”—Sonia**

Nazario, Pulitzer Prize winner, and author of *Enrique's Journey*

