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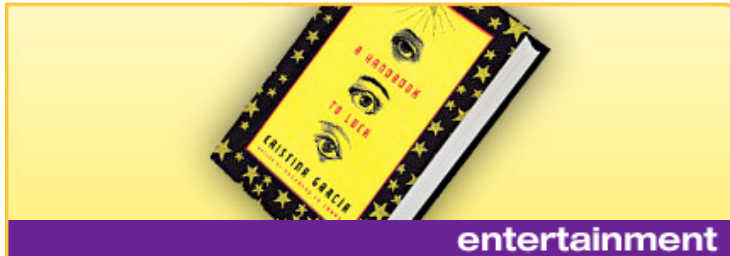
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Online Extra. . . Interview with Cristina García The Publication of *A Handbook to Luck*

BY CARLOS J. QUEIRÓS
February/March 2007

Acclaimed author Cristina García speaks candidly with AARP Segunda Juventud Online about aging, Cuba, and the importance of roots in her first interview about *A Handbook to Luck*.

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Q: You were 33 years old when your first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, was published, and are now 48. How do you think age has affected your writing?

A: Aside from ergonomic issues—my back and neck are a mess from years of sitting behind a desk—I have more to say now. Just having lived in this world longer, having been a mother for the past 14 years, having read more poetry. But some things never change. I still get immense pleasure from fashioning a good sentence. I just began something new and I'm as excited as 15 years ago when I started writing. I can't, however, keep up the same pace and I have to incorporate yoga into my breaks. Writing is not an aerobic activity; it's a product of living, imagination, and richness of experience.

Q: How long did it take you to write *A Handbook to Luck*?

A: About three years, but that's on the fast side for me.

Q: How did you come up with the title?

A: With my previous books, I struggled with titles. With this book, I always knew what it would be. I tried to highlight the notion of serendipity, happenstance, coincidence, and how close we come to taking a different road that could completely alter our lives. And then, this is very Cuban, the whole notion of nostalgia, regret, and a certain historical revisionism.

Q: Have you read the translations of your work?

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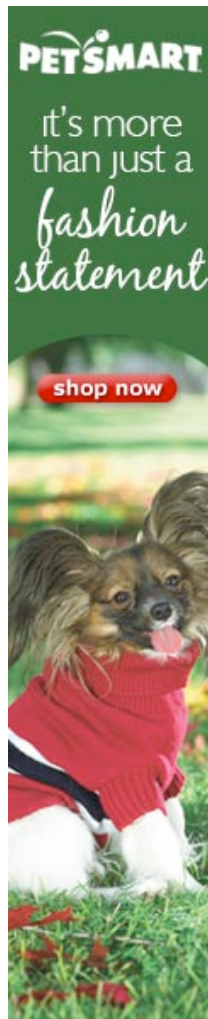
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A: I read *Sonar en cubano* (*Dreaming in Cuban*), but only after it was published and I received several complaints about the translation. It was translated in Spain, so it was linguistically specific to the Iberian Peninsula rather than the Caribbean. To some Cubans, the language used made the events of the book inauthentic. Then with the *The Agüero Sisters*, it became important to me that the Spanish sing in its own way. A Cuban poet translated it and I was delighted with the result. In Spain, however, the publishers said they'd have to do their own translation before they could publish it. It became evident that all kinds of linguistic hierarchies were at play.

books:

- ◆ [A Handbook to Luck](#)
- ◆ [Dreaming in Cuban](#)
- ◆ [The Agüero Sisters](#)

Q: Why was it important to you to teach your daughter Pilar to speak Spanish?

A: It's a crucial element of identity. She's a mix of cultures and I wanted to give her the ability to articulate herself in Spanish. It may not seem like the most important thing to her now, but over time she'll realize it's essential to who she is, to who we are, to where she comes from.

Q: Although *A Handbook to Luck* explores the Cuban experience, it does so less directly than your previous works. Why so?

A: My first three books are a sort of loose trilogy of the Cuban experience, or at least what interested me about it. I wanted to use a larger palette in this book. Not that I'm in any way done with the Cuban American experience; it's hard for me to imagine writing a book without a single Cuban character. But in terms of it being a central focus in regards to identity, I've worked through that in the first three books.

Q: What do you think of the current state of Cuba?

A: Only my grandmother and my aunt are still there. My grandmother is going to be 102 years old! My aunt is in her 70s and has dedicated the last 40 years to taking care of her mother. Everyone else left Cuba to live in Miami or South America. My view on Cuba has changed over the years, partly from listening to the stories of why they left and partly from what I've seen during my visits. The overwhelming sense I get is that there's a lot of wasted human energy and creativity—it's tragic.

Q: There's certainly a caretaking theme throughout *A Handbook to Luck*. Is this something you were consciously exploring?

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A: Wow, this is literally the first time I'm thinking about it in terms of caretaking. To some degree I must have been exploring it, especially in the case of Enrique and his father. The question of what do we owe our parents. Do these expectations differ from one culture to the next? From one generation to the next? The ties that bind may not always be pretty, but they tell us a lot about who we are and what matters to us.

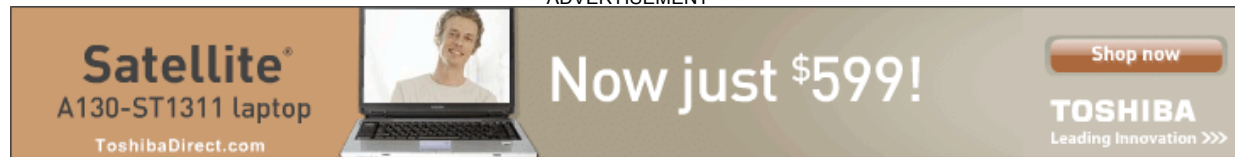
Q: What are you working on now?

A: I'm only about 70 pages into it, so it's still very early in the first draft, but the departure point is a couple spending a week in a Guatemalan hotel while trying to adopt a baby girl. After all the vast time and geographical expanses I've worked with, I'm trying to write a book that is very concentrated in time and geographically fixed. I'm having a lot of fun with it and can't wait to see what happens next.

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