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My project as one of the Fenwick Scholars for the Class of 2007 is a collection of fictional short stories set in the Cuban-American exile community. As a creative writer I am inspired by this community not only for the obvious reason that I am a part of it, but also because I find it so rich in characters to meet and stories to tell. Cuban-American writers have depicted the aftermath of Fidel Castro's revolution through a social history that concentrates on the experiences of individuals, lives that come to symbolize movements and struggles much larger than themselves. I concentrate on the more recent moments in Cuban-American history that shaped my generation's experience of growing up in exile.

The initial concern of the collection was to examine the experience of exile and its effect on identity formation in a community where some still believe our existence in the United States is only temporary. For the older generations this means living in a state of nostalgia for an idealized past, and for the younger generations these means longing to return to a place they have never been. This past summer when major news organizations were reporting the possibility of Fidel's death, I watched young men and women born in the United States flooding my neighborhood streets and proclaiming that the day Fidel died would be the happiest of their own lives. Growing up with the idyllic stories of our parents and grandparents, "returning" became the dream for us as well. For children that have grown up idealizing another place and time, how do we define ourselves as American-born?

Within the larger scope of living in exile, two other themes have developed during the process of writing the collection. Both have to do with this same conflict between Cuban minds in American lifestyles. The first is that of gender roles in a culture where women who cater to men somehow remain the dominant presence in the household. The second has come to symbolize the bigger picture for Cubans nearing their fifth decade in the United States. I focus on characters coming to realizations in their lives, starting to deal with truths they have kept hidden even from themselves. The Cuban-American community is just now experiencing the disillusion that every immigrant group eventually comes to—the realization that the United States has become home, and that the country they wish they could return to no longer exists.

Although born in Miami, going to Cuba always seemed in my mind to be a long awaited homecoming. Somehow I had been waiting for something since twenty-five years before I was born. My task as a writer becomes to reduce the scenes of my memory, or in most cases the scenes of others' memories, to shadows by putting them in English words on paper. After struggling to find a voice that was both accessible and authentic, I have come to think of my readers as guests at a Cuban party. We would do anything to make you feel comfortable, but we're also not going to stop being ourselves. In attempting to accurately capture what it means to be a Cuban in exile, my goal is to invite readers into a new world while having them look past the differences in culture, setting, and even language, to relate to the characters and plots on a universal level.