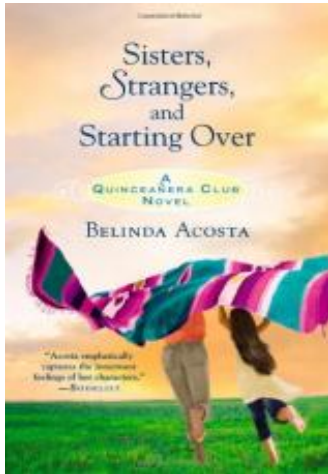

Sisters, Strangers, and Starting Over: A Quinceañera Club Novel

by Belinda Acosta



About the Book

Beatriz Sánchez-Milligan is shocked when her 14-year-old niece, Celeste, stumbles into her 25th wedding anniversary party. Celeste reveals that her mother, Perla, has died and that she has nowhere else to go. Beatriz immediately takes Celeste in-a decision that troubles her husband, Larry, who remembers that wherever Perla went, trouble followed. He worries his wife is rushing in without having all the facts. Undaunted, Beatriz begins to plan a quinceañera for Celeste; but the party planning doesn't comfort Celeste, nor does it ease Beatriz's pain.

Discussion Guide

1. Did you have a quinceañera, a sweet sixteen, or a bat mitzvah? What did it mean to you? To your loved ones?
2. Traditional quinceañeras have deep ties to Catholicism. How is religion treated in this novel? In your opinion, is it a good thing that traditionally religious celebrations (like the quinceañera) are becoming increasingly secular? Why?
3. Do you believe quinceañeras as a cultural tradition will continue or be lost over time?
4. Beatriz and her husband, Larry, could be said to have a "mixed marriage," since she is Mexican American and he is Irish American. What do you see as their common bonds? Their differences? What roles do culture, race, and class play in their relationship?
5. As working mothers, Beatriz, Josie Mendoza, and Lucy Milligan are starkly different. In what ways do you identify with each of these women?
6. In the beginning of the book, Beatriz has a number of startling "incidents" but is reluctant to talk about them, even to

her best friend, Ana. To what do you attribute her experiences? Do you believe it was her conscience, a dream, or the ghost of her sister, Perla, that was truly haunting her?

7. In the beginning, Beatriz has a hard time relating to her niece, and Celeste feels out of place in her aunt's world. Besides the sudden newness of their situation, what else do you think contributed to their difficulty in connecting?

8. Beatriz is adamant about taking her niece, Celeste, in, even as it threatens her marriage. Did Beatriz put her marriage in too much danger? Does family come before everything in your life? Why or why not?

9. Besides celebrating her fifteenth birthday, what do you believe was the meaning behind Celeste's quinceañera?

10. Celeste and her cousin Raúl hit it off almost immediately, while her other cousin Seamus is severely threatened by her appearance. What do you imagine Celeste's relationship will be like with Seamus and her other cousins in the future? Between Celeste and Beatriz? Between Celeste and Larry?

Author Bio

Belinda Acosta has written and published plays, short stories, and essays. As a journalist, her work has appeared in the *Austin American-Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, the *San Antonio Express-News*, *The San Antonio Current*, and *AlterNet*. Her short story "Tortilla Dough" appeared in *Saguaro*, a publication of the University of Arizona in 1992. In 1993, she produced, directed and performed in a multi-media dance-theater performance of *La Llorona*. National exposure came in 1995 when she read her personal essay "Gran Baile," on *Latino USA - the Radio Journal of News and Culture*, carried on National Public Radio. Acosta received a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from The University of Texas in 1997. She lives in Austin, Texas and is the TV and media columnist for *The Austin Chronicle*.

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