Gringo

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This children's book is written for students in the third to the fifth grades. The ideas for this book took two years to develop and are the product of my learning at the collegiate level and from elementary classroom experience. In the field of children's literature, there is very little literature featuring Hispanic students. What literature there is containing Hispanic characters typically focuses on a few types of Hispanics, such as those from Mexico or Spain, and disregards others. One Hispanic group often left out of literature is the Puerto Rican. I decided to feature two types of Puerto Ricans in my book: 1) Puerto Ricans residing in their homeland, and 2) Puerto Ricans who have recently moved to the United States in an attempt to make a better life for themselves. I also chose to highlight the city of San Juan--its customs and its attractions. The book is fictional, and is intended to develop the reader's appreciation for the Puerto Rican culture.
Chapter 1

The fifth grade started out like every other year for me. I had the same kids in my class. The lunchroom still served hot dogs on Monday. We began the day with the Pledge of Allegiance and the morning announcements. The best part of fifth grade, as far as I could see, was my new teacher, Mrs. Stevens. She had big, blue eyes, and long, red-brown hair, and had lines around her mouth from when she laughed, which she liked to do a lot. She was really nice and we all liked her right away.

On Friday, we had our first assembly. A lady from the Cincinnati Zoo came in with a bunch of animals. We got to see a monkey, a tropical bird from Puerto Rico called a *reinita*, and a snake. I even got to touch the snake; it was a boa constrictor.

On the following Tuesday, Mr. Richardson, the principal, came into our room to talk to Mrs. Stevens before the bell rang. "I'm going to be talking to Mr. Richardson for a minute. I expect all of you to be sitting and working quietly after the bell rings," Mrs. Stevens said. "Your spelling assignment is on the board. You should be working on that." She and Mr. Richardson walked out into the hallway. Right away, Amanda and Josh started passing notes back and forth. A few of the girls were talking and giggling. Mrs. Stevens and Mr. Richardson started talking quietly in the hallway. Matt, who sits by the door, could hear them.

"Timmy, did you hear that?" he whispered.
"Hear what?"
"You know--them," he replied. He nodded at Mr. Richardson and Mrs. Stevens. "We're getting a new student. A boy. Hey, now we'll have even sides for football at recess!"
"Cool! We need another quarterback. How about if you and I are on the same team and you play quarterback? Maybe the new kid can be quarterback for the other team."

"Yeah, that's cool." Just then the bell rang. Matt and I both turned around in our seats and pretended to be concentrating on our work. We were both more interested in planning out the day's football game since now we would have enough players. I hoped this new boy could play quarterback. Scott Johnson had moved away last year, and nobody had been able to replace him as quarterback.

Mrs. Stevens walked back in the room. She was smiling. "Class, I have great news. We are getting a new student today. His name is Juan Ramirez."

"Cool! What's he like?" Matt blurted out.

"Where did he used to live?" I asked.

Mrs. Stevens smiled. "I don't know much more about Juan than you do. All I know about him is that he is in the fifth grade and that he has moved here from Puerto Rico. Spanish is Juan's native language, but he can speak English also. He'll be here in a few minutes. I want you to make Juan feel at home here. I think he would really appreciate that."

We heard the door open and Mr. Richardson walked in the room. Beside him was a boy with short, curly, midnight black hair and light brown skin. He was looking down at the floor. Mr. Richardson looked at Mrs. Stevens and said, "This is your new student. Juan, this is Mrs. Stevens." Juan looked up at Mrs. Stevens and smiled shyly.

Mrs. Stevens said, "Juan, I'm so happy to meet you, and I know the class is also. Why don't you have a seat here? We're going to begin our social studies lesson now. I already put your textbooks on your desk. The social studies book is the one with the blue and orange cover."

Mr. Richardson winked at Juan, turned around, and walked out of the room. Josh, who sat next to Juan, asked him why he had moved to the United States. Juan said, "Mi padre... my father needed work. My uncle lives here and said he could help us."

"Geez!" Adam said. "You mean your dad didn't have a job in Puerto Rico?" Juan's face turned pink, even his ears. He looked up at the clock and then down at the floor. I could tell that he was embarrassed.
Josh added, "Juan, none of us know Spanish. We speak English here. You're going to have to talk so we can understand you." Juan continued looking down at the ground and didn't speak at all.

"Josh!" Mrs. Stevens said, shocked. I didn't even know she could hear Josh. Her face was as pink as Juan's. "That was completely inappropriate. Now you apologize to Juan, and I don't want to hear any more of that or you can spend some time with me at recess!"

Josh mumbled an apology under his breath and stared at his social studies book.

We started our social studies lesson, but my thoughts were on Juan. What was he like? Did he like to do the things that I liked? I felt sorry for him. Adam and Josh hadn't been very nice to him. I didn't want to say anything to Josh about it though—he would probably be mean to me for standing up for Juan. I stared out the window. There were some little kids playing with a puppy on the hill near the school. The puppy was small and brown with a few black spots on it. It was running and jumping and climbing all over the boys. One boy's hair was wet with sweat. He fell down on the dry green-brown grass, laughing as the puppy licked his face. I looked up at the late August sky. It was a brilliant blue, but thunder clouds were building in the distance. I hoped it wouldn't rain and keep us from playing football at recess.

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The day dragged on, but recess time eventually came. Matt and I were the first ones out on the playground, as usual. We ran down the hill to the field. Josh, Adam, Amanda, and a few of the fourth graders joined us, but Juan didn't.

"Where is he?" Matt asked.

"I don't know," Josh replied.

"Oh, there he is! He's talking to Mrs. Stevens on the top playground!" Matt pointed out.

"Maybe he's waiting for us to ask him to play football with us," I said. "We should probably ask him if he wants to play."

So we ran up to the top of the hill to Mrs. Stevens and Juan. "Hey Juan!" I called. "We usually play football at recess. Do you wanna' play with us?"
Juan had his hands stuffed in the pockets of his shorts and was staring at the blacktop. "Oh, could I just watch?" he asked.
"I'm sure the boys wouldn't mind that at all, would you boys?" Mrs. Stevens asked.

We nodded our approval and started to play again. Juan came down and watched for a while. My team scored the first touchdown and kicked the extra point. The other team came back with a field goal, so they were only down by four points.
"This isn't fair," Josh said. "The sides are uneven." He noticed Juan. He walked over to him. "Hey, man, don't you want to play?" he asked.
"No puedo jugar... er, I don't play so well," Juan said.
"Why don't you speak in English, Juan? You're in Ohio now!" Adam said. He had followed Josh.
"I am trying. Mrs. Stevens says I am doing well with your language," Juan sniffled. He looked angry at Josh and Adam.
"She's just saying that. She compliments everyone but she doesn't always mean it; she's just trying to be nice. Listen, we're trying to play a game here, and we don't have enough players without you. Come on, just try it!" Josh taunted and threw the ball really hard to Juan. Juan missed the ball, and it landed on the grass. His lips were drawn tightly together and he clenched his fists as he bent over to pick up the ball. He tossed it lightly to Matt.
"Josh, leave him alone. Why do you have to be so mean to people all the time?" Matt said.

Josh looked at Matt and scowled. "Matt, just stay out of it. If I want to make fun of the whimp, I'll make fun of him. Now, let's play football. Amanda, Adam, Eric, and I are on one team. Matt, Timmy, Stephanie, and Juan are on the other team," Josh said.

We started to play again. My team had a huddle. Matt took charge. "OK, I'm the quarterback this time. Timmy, you'll be my snapper and you'll also run for passes. Stephanie, can you run for passes?"
"Yeah, sure," she said.
"OK, I'm going to pass to you first. Be ready. Juan, you block for Timmy and Stephanie. Break!"

Amanda kicked the ball off. I caught it and started running. Eric rushed towards me. Juan just stood there letting Eric tackle me.
"Juan, what are you doing?" Josh asked. "Let's do that play over!"
Amanda kicked the ball off again. This time, Matt caught the ball. Josh tackled Matt. Juan had been standing only a few yards away, watching.

"Juan, don't just stand there. You were supposed to be blocking for Timmy." Josh said. "You really don't know how to play football, do you? Geez! What did you play in Puerto Rico?" he taunted. Juan stared at the ground. He concentrated on rolling a pebble back and forth with his foot. Matt looked really mad at Josh, but I could tell that he wasn't going to say anything again. Getting yelled at by Josh once was enough for Matt.

Juan said, "Well, we played beisbol, tag, tops, and stuff like that." He was avoiding Josh's stare by looking down at his feet. "What do you play other than football?"

"We play lots of games," Amanda said. "We play kickball, basketball, tag, and run relay races. I'm the fastest runner in the fifth grade," she said proudly.

She can be such a pain sometimes! She's smart and the teachers like her, so she thinks she's cool. A few weeks ago, she and Matt raced each other. Matt was the fastest runner in the school, but he had a sore ankle the day he raced her. She beat him, and now she thinks that means she is the fastest runner. Matt can beat her any day!

"Well, we don't have any bats or balls out here now, so we can't play baseball." Adam said. "So, do you guys want to play tag?" We nodded our heads.

"Juan's it! Juan, count to 100. You better count out loud so we know you're not cheating. Do it in English, OK? The swing set is base. Once you're caught, you're it--no cheating!" Josh yelled and ran off. We played until the bell rang, signaling us to go inside for science.

* * *

My family ate dinner late that night because Mom had to work late. Dad cooked dinner for us. I liked it best when he cooked dinner because he always let me help.

I looked at Mom when she walked in the door. She reminded me of my sister Beth. They both had dark brown eyes and long, brown hair. Mom taught marine biology at the university. Beth wanted to be a marine biologist. Meagan and I looked more like
Dad. We had blond hair and brown eyes. Dad was really tall. Mom says that Meagan and I are tall for our ages, but that she isn't sure how tall we'll be when we grow up. Meagan is only a baby and I'm ten. Dad teaches at the university with Mom, except he teaches English. He used to write books, but he says he doesn't have time anymore because he takes care of Meagan and me when he gets home from work. He usually gets home before I get home from school, but Meagan has to go to a babysitter's house during the day.

"So, Timmers, how was your day?" Mom asked.
"Fine. We got a new student. A boy," I answered.
"What's his name?"
"Juan. We played tag with him at recess today. He's a fast runner."
"Juan huh?" Dad said. "What school did Juan come from?"
"I don't know," I answered, "but he just moved here from Puerto Rico."
"Neat!" Mom said. "I bet it will be lots of fun to talk to him about Puerto Rico. Is he nice?"
"I guess so."

Mom and Dad started talking then, and I started thinking about everything that had gone on that day. I recalled the boys who had been playing with the puppy outside the school. "Mom, Dad, can I get a dog?" I asked.

"What brought that up, Timmy?" Mom asked.
Dad looked at me and said, "Partner, we've talked about this before. No one is home enough to take care of a dog. Maybe when you and your sister are old enough to take care of it by yourselves."

"But Dad, I'm old enough now! Matt has a dog and he takes care of it all by himself. He says that I take good care of his dog when I come over! I even saw some little kids playing with a dog today. Everyone has a dog but me!"

"Now, Timmy, you know that's not true. I'm sorry, but we cannot get a dog. At least not now. Maybe later." Mom said. She looked at Dad.

He added, "Tim, there's nothing more to talk about. Maybe later."

They both looked mad at me. I looked down at my plate and didn't talk anymore.
Chapter 2

Josh, Amanda, Adam, Matt, and I sat with Juan at lunch the next day. "Hey Juan, how come you aren't eating?" asked Josh. "The corn is really good today."

"It does not look so good. We don't eat a lot of corn in Puerto Rico," he said.

"What do you mean, you don't eat a lot of corn in Puerto Rico?" Adam laughed as he put his tray down next to Juan's. "Everybody likes corn. So, what do you like, Juan?"

"I like plenty of things. I like rice and beans, pineapples, bananas, mangoes, and piraguas—things like that."

"What's that? Par-what?" I asked.

"Piragua. It is like a drink. You take a big block of ice and scrape some off. Then you put it into a little cup and pour juice over it. My favorite flavor is cherry."

"Oh, you mean snow cones. We have those here," Matt said. "Cherry's my favorite flavor too!"

Matt and I started eating lunch with Juan and playing with him at recess almost every day. We started teaching him football, but we played baseball sometimes too. He taught us a few Spanish words like "futbal americano," which means football, and "perro," which means dog.

Adam, Josh, and Amanda were still a little mean to him sometimes. They wouldn't sit by him at lunch and they made fun of his accent. I felt sorry for him, but there was nothing I could do. Josh was the meanest boy in the whole school, and I didn't want to pick a fight with him.
Every Tuesday, my class has music right before lunch. Mr. Sanders, our music teacher, makes us sing old songs. On Thursday, we were singing "My Country Tis of Thee," and Josh started talking to Adam and laughing. Mr. Sanders stopped us in the middle of the song. "Josh, Adam, what's the matter?" he asked.

Josh said, "It's him...Juan. He talks funny and he can't sing like we do either!"

"There's nothing wrong with his singing, boys," Mr. Sanders said. "Juan sings just fine. He has a nice voice. Now class, let's continue. And that's enough interruptions!"

Mr. Sanders turned around to help Amanda play the drums. We started the song again, and Josh and Adam kept pointing at Juan and laughing. "He says he can speak English, but he doesn't sound like us!" Josh whispered. Mr. Sanders didn't notice. Juan stared at his book and didn't look up. His face turned pink and he stopped smiling. I felt sorry for him. They didn't need to be so mean to him.
Chapter 3

Dad and I were sitting at the kitchen table playing checkers when Mom came home from work on Tuesday. She was home early. It wasn't even time for Dad to make dinner yet.

"How was your day, Timmy?" Mom asked.
"Fine. Matt asked if I could go over to his house and play after school tomorrow. Can I?"
"I don't see why not, but I want to talk to his mother first." Mom said.

"How was your day, Nicole?" Dad asked her.
"Oh, pretty good. It was a little crazy at work. I just want to get out of these clothes and into some jeans. Timmy, there are some cookies in the pantry if you want to get them out for snack." She walked into the bedroom and Dad followed her.

I got some cookies and sat at the table eating them. I looked out the window. The seasons were changing. Mr. Arndt from next door had just begun raking leaves. He had two big maple trees in his yard and they were leaving orange, red, and yellow leaves all over the ground. Some days, he lets me go over to his yard to play in them. I pile them up and jump into them. Then I have to rake them all up again so Mr. Arndt can put them in paper bags.

I could hear what Mom and Dad were saying if I stopped chewing. "Wow, that's great Nicole!" Dad cheered. "So, when would it be? What do you think about me and the kids? Maybe we could work it out so that we could come too." Dad was really excited about something.

Their voices got quieter, so I walked down the hallway and closer to their door so I could hear what they were saying. "It's next
"semester," I heard Mom say. "We're going to have to hurry to get everything set up. It will only be for three semesters," Mom replied. "We can talk about this some more. There is a lot to discuss. I don't have to give the university an answer until next month. I'm so excited. I hope it works out."

I could hear one of them walking toward the door, so I ran back into the kitchen. I wondered what Mom and Dad were talking about. Soon, I gave up trying to figure out what they were saying and went into my room to do some homework.

* * *

Mom was beaming at dinner that night. "Could someone pass the carrots please?" she requested. She leaned over to wipe the baby food off Meagan's face.

Dad passed the carrots to her and said, "Timmy, your mom and I have some exciting news for you. Go ahead and tell him, Nicole." He smiled at her and put his hand on top of hers.

"Are we getting a puppy?" I asked.

"No, Honey, we're not," Mom said. "My boss asked me today if I would like to do some research. It's very important to the university and it's a great opportunity for me. The research isn't around here though. It would mean that we would have to move for a while. Dad, Meagan, you, and I would all move together. Beth would stay at school. What do you say Angel?"

"Mom," I muttered, "where are we going?"

"We'll be living in Puerto Rico."

"Puerto Rico. That's where Juan is from!"

"That's right! I hadn't even thought about that!" Mom said.

"How long will we be there?"

"It would be a while. A year and a half. You would miss the end of this school year and all of the sixth grade. When you come back, you'll be a big seventh grader at the junior high school!"

"Why do you have to work down there?" I asked. "What's wrong with here?"

"Well, Honey, there are animals around the ocean in Puerto Rico that we don't have around here."

"What would I do there? Would I still have to go to school, or could I stay home with Dad and Meagan?"

Mom smiled. "You're going to school no matter where you
are, Timmy. Puerto Rico has some good schools. And when you're not in school, we can go to the beach and play on the playground."

"What will you do while we're down there, Dad?"

"I don't really know yet. I'm going to see if I can get a research leave from the university so I can go to Puerto Rico and write a book. I've been wanting to do that for a long time, and this would be the perfect chance. I'll have to talk to my department about it. I'll work at home though, so I'll be able to watch Meagan."

I could tell that they wanted to know what I thought about it. What was I supposed to say? Were they kidding? Why would I want to live in Puerto Rico, where they speak Spanish and don't know how to play football?

"Hey guys?" I asked.

"What, Partner?" answered Dad.

"What if I don't make any friends there?" I asked.

"Sweetheart, you'll be fine. You'll make friends, just like you did here," Mom sounded so sure about it.

Dad added, "Mom, Meagan, and I will be with you in Puerto Rico, Son. We're going to have a great time—it will be like a vacation."

"But what about Beth?"

"Your sister has to stay here and go to school. I know you'll miss her, but it won't be for very long. Beth will visit sometimes and she'll call and write you lots of letters I bet. You'll still be her favorite brother!"

I asked to be excused from the table and ran to my room where I could be alone. Puerto Rico—why would I want to go to dumb Puerto Rico! All my friends are in Ohio!

* * *

The next morning, I stood at the bus stop. I was tired because I hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. I had cried a lot, and then I thought about what Mom and Dad had said. I would still be with my family and it would be like a vacation. I had made new friends when we moved here a few years ago. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

I sat by Juan at lunch that day. I wanted to find out what Puerto Rico was like.

"Juan, can I ask you something?"
"Si'-of course you can," he said.

"What is Puerto Rico like?"

"It is the best place in the world," Juan said, smiling.

"What do you do for fun there?"

"Oh, there are lots of things to do in Puerto Rico. My family liked to go to the beach and play there. We played baseball and tag and flew kites."

"Juan," I said, "what did you do in the winter? Did you ever sled ride or make snow angels or anything?"

Juan looked confused. "Sled ride? ¿Que es? I do not know what that means."

"You know," I said. "You ride down a hill when it snows."

Juan laughed. "Timmy, it does not snow in Puerto Rico. It is warm in Puerto Rico all of the time."

"What? Is it warm enough in the winter to go swimming?" I asked.

"Si' Timmy. Sometimes we went swimming on Christmas Day."

"What are the girls like?"

Juan blushed. "It's different in Puerto Rico. Girls and boys don't play together as much as they do here."

Matt, Adam, and Josh sat down then, so we stopped talking about it. I wondered what Juan meant about the girls.
Chapter 4

The school year went quickly. The colorful fall leaves were gone now, replaced by a light blanket of snow. Instead of playing football, Matt and I taught Juan how to make snow angels and snowmen after school. It was the first time that Juan had seen snow. Finally, school let out a few days before Christmas. Dad picked me up on that last day to help me clean out my desk and take my papers and projects home. I gave Mrs. Stevens some banana bread and a Christmas ornament.

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Mom and Dad talked about Puerto Rico almost every day, or at least it seemed like it. Dad had talked to his department chair, and the university was letting him go to Puerto Rico for the next three semesters to work on writing a book. Mom and Dad had begun packing early in December. It seemed like they were bringing everything we owned.

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Christmas that year was different. "Oh, I'm going to miss you all when you are gone," Grandma moaned. "My little Meagan will be all grown up when you get back. I won't get to hear her start talking. And Timmy. Timmy will be practically a teenager by the next time I see him! What will next Christmas be like? Grandpa and I will be all alone!"

We'll call and send presents. Maybe if we all save up, you'll be able to fly down to visit us for next Christmas."

"I don't want to go to Puerto Rico for Christmas! Silly place! No snow! What kind of Christmas would that be!" Grandma said.

"That's enough! Please don't talk like that in front of the kids. They're going to love Puerto Rico. It's only for a year and a half; one Christmas."

Grandma must have missed us already because she and Grandpa gave us so many presents. I got lots of things for the beach—new shorts and swim trunks, buckets, shovels, a raft, and a new kite. Meagan got water wings to put on her arms while she swam.

"You be careful with her in the water, Nicole. Babies don't belong in the ocean!" Grandma muttered.

But my favorite present that Christmas was Watson, my new puppy. He was a small Yorkshire terrier, and was brown with black spots. He had a lot of energy, and he kept licking everybody on the face. Grandma and Grandpa gave him to me. "So you'll have a friend, Timmy," Grandma said.

"Now Martha, Timmy will have plenty of friends in Puerto Rico. He has plenty of friends here, doesn't he?" Grandpa said.

"Can I really keep him?" I asked Mom and Dad.

"Yes, you can," Dad nodded. "Your grandparents asked us about him a few weeks ago. We decided that you're old enough to take care of him."

"Oh, good! Thank you, Grandma and Grandpa. I'll love him and take such good care of him!"

"Timmy, you've never been on a plane before, have you?" Grandpa asked. "My grandson is going to take his first plane ride."

"I remember your mother's first plane ride," Grandma said. "It was for your parents' honeymoon. She was so nervous. She acted like she wasn't, but I knew. Yes, she was scared!"

"Actually, Nicole was on a plane when she was just about Timmy's age. Do you remember, Nicole?"

"Oh, yes! I'd forgotten about that, Dad! We were going to visit Uncle Ben in California," Mom said. "I had so much fun! The pilot took me into the cockpit before the plane took off. The stewardess brought me milk and cookies, a coloring book, and a box of crayons."

"Timmy, you're going to love it!" Grandpa said. You can look
out and see the clouds below you. If it's nice out, you can see cars and houses below too. Make your mom and dad let you sit by a window. It's the best."

At the end of the day, we piled up our presents and put them in the trunk. Grandma kissed me. "Puerto Rico. Hmph!"

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We had to get up early Friday morning to get to the Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky International Airport. Beth drove us there. "I'm going to miss you guys. Don't you forget to write to me. That means you too, Timmy. And don't you grow any more while you're gone either."

A plane flew over overhead. Dad said, "Look at that plane, Timmy. It's flying awfully low—it must be getting ready to land. Maybe it's the plane we'll be taking to Puerto Rico."

In a few minutes, Beth pulled the car under a sign that said "Loading and unloading only. All others will be towed." Mom, Dad, and Beth unloaded our suitcases from the car. After everything was out, I got to go with Beth to park the car. "I'm gonna miss you, Timmy. I'm jealous. You're going to have such a good time in Puerto Rico. I'll be stuck in Ohio, studying and stuff, and you'll be on the beach every day, having the time of your life."

"I'm going to miss you though, Beth. Why can't you come with us?"

"Sweetie, I can't. Actually, it would be a great place for me to study marine biology, but it would be too hard for me to transfer colleges now. But I'll be down to visit this summer. I'm going to be there for two whole months while school is out. That'll be fun, won't it? You have fun, OK? And write me to tell me what I'm missing."

We walked into the airport and found Mom, Dad, and Meagan. "Mom, Dad," I said. "I miss Watson. I feel sorry for him. Why can't he come on the plane with me?"

"Timmers," Dad said. "It's such a long flight. He might bark and bother the other passengers. He's safe where he is."

Watson was in a cage in the luggage area. He had also had to get shots at the vet's office before we could take him into Puerto Rico. "Beth, thanks for driving us," Dad said. "We'll call you when we get in. You be careful and have a good semester," Dad said.
"I will. Bye, Mom, Dad," Beth said. "See you in five months. I'll miss all of you!" She hugged Mom and Dad. "Meagan, you be good for Mommy and Daddy." Beth kissed Meagan on the top of her head, and then turned to me. "Bye Timmers. Remember what I said." She gave me a big bear hug and messed up my hair. "Bye, Beth," I mumbled. "I'll miss you." I looked down at the ground.

"Come on, Timmers. We'd better go," Mom said softly.

We had to go through a metal detector. Mom and Dad had to empty their pockets. They took out their coins and keys. After that, we walked down a long hallway that took us to the area where we waited for our plane. After waiting for about a half an hour, a woman speaking over the loudspeaker said, "Flight number 131 nonstop to San Juan now boarding at gate 2."

"That's us," Dad said. "Let's go!"

We walked down a covered walkway onto a plane. The walkway looked like an accordion. When we got to the top of the stairs that led to the door of the plane, there were three women wearing blue skirts and jackets and maroon ties. Each one had on a pin with wings on it. They all looked at Meagan and at me and smiled. "What's your name?" one of them asked.

"Timmy," I said. "This is my baby sister, Meagan," I added. "Oooh, she's so cute!" said another. "How old are you?"

"I'm ten. I'm in the fifth grade."

"How would you like to come up front and meet the pilot? He just loves to show his plane off to people."

One of the other women showed Mom, Dad, and Meagan to their seats while I walked away with the first woman. "I'm Nancy," she said. We walked into the cockpit. Out of the front of the plane, I could see the other planes and some trucks. "This is captain Higgins." Nancy said. "He flies this plane. Captain, this is Timmy. He's ten."

The captain let me sit in his chair for a minute. "This is how I learned how to fly a plane," he said. "My father was a pilot. Sometimes he would let me get on the plane before he took off on a trip. I would sit on his lap and do just what you are doing now. This is the altimeter," he said and pointed to a dial in front of him. "It is just like a barometer. It measures atmospheric pressure." He showed me some more instruments. Nancy gave me a pin with wings on it and brought me back to my seat.
Mom and Dad let me sit by the window, just like Grandpa had said. I saw lots of trucks near the plane. Dad told me that one was carrying our luggage to the plane, and one was pumping gas into it. Pretty soon, the plane started to move.

"Ladies and gentlemen," a woman announced. "Welcome to flight number 131 nonstop from Cincinnati to San Juan. My name is Rebecca and I'm one of your flight attendants today. At this time, the captain asks that you fasten your seatbelt, as we will be taking off soon. There is a light above your seat indicating that your seatbelt is to be fastened. During the flight, the pilot may turn this light off. At that time, you may remove your seatbelt. There is also a light above your seat reminding you that there is no smoking on the airplane. This pertains to all areas of the plane, including the restrooms. There is an oxygen mask above you. In the event of an emergency, the mask will pop out of the compartment directly above you. Adults, put your own mask on before helping any children around you. Your seat cushions work as flotation devices. There are straps underneath them. Lunch will be served on this flight. We will be serving turkey pitas, fruit cups, and muffins. Carbonated beverages and juices are complimentary; mixed drinks are available for three dollars. There are headphones for the radio in the back of the seat in front of you. Feel free to use them. We will also be playing movies for you shortly after lunch. The flight attendants will be around in a few moments with headphones for watching the movies. They are four dollars and will be collected prior to landing. It is chilly now in San Juan, but high temperatures today are expected to be in the low seventies. They are under sunny skies. We will be taking off shortly and should be arriving in San Juan right on schedule. Thank you and have a pleasant flight."

I looked out the window as the plane lifted. The sky was overcast. It had snowed the night before. Since it was early in the morning, no one had walked on the snow, and it looked like a blanket spread around the lawns. I could see houses and cars. I wondered if the people below were looking up at the plane.

After we were up in the air, I looked out of the window again. The clouds weren't above me now—they were below me. If I looked straight ahead, I could see the sun shining.

I looked out the window for a long time before a flight attendant came around with the lunch cart. She gave me a paper plate with a turkey pita and muffin on it and a plastic cup full of
After we ate, I watched a movie. Mom and Dad liked the movie, but I thought it was boring, so I mostly just looked outside. I must have fallen asleep. The next thing I remember, I was looking out the window and seeing water. Lots of water. It was more blue than any other water I had ever seen. It looked like the color of a blue crayon. Mom said, "Look Timmy. There's Puerto Rico!" I could see land now, mostly a beach with lots of people on it. They were in bathing suits and a lot of them were swimming. I thought that was weird until I remembered what Juan had told me about people going to the beach even on Christmas.

* * *

The plane landed. I said goodbye to Nancy and we walked through another accordion tunnel. We walked into the airport. There was a man and a woman standing in the airport with a sign that said, "¡Bienvenidos! Welcome Nicole, Jeff, Timmy, and Meagan."

The man and woman walked over to us, smiling. The woman was hardly taller than I was. She had short, red, curly hair and light skin. She looked like she probably laughed a lot, just like Mrs. Stevens. "Hello there!" she said. "Are you Nicole?"

"Yes, I am," Mom said. "And you are...?"

"Oh, I'm sorry! My name is Jasmine. This is Tom, my husband." I looked at Tom. He was tall, and had chocolate brown hair and lots of freckles. Jasmine said, "The university sent us here to welcome you. We'll take you to your apartment. We'll be working with you at the university. We're both marine biologists too."

"Well, thank you," Mom said. "How long have you been waiting for us?"

"Oh, we've only been here for a few minutes." Jasmine noticed me then. "And how old are you?"

"I'm ten," I said.

"Wonderful! We have a son just your age. Oh, Scott will be so happy to have someone new to play with!"

We needed to get our luggage and to pick up Watson. Jasmine and Tom showed us the way. In a little while, we would be on our way to our new apartment!
Chapter 5

I looked around the apartment. We had what Mom called a furnished apartment. That means that it came with furniture. Our other stuff was still in Ohio. "Jeff, there's no use in selling the house and all the furniture. We'll be back to use it soon, and we don't want to have to move it back and forth," Mom had said. Some friends of Mom and Dad were moving into a new house soon and were waiting for it to be built, so they were going to live in our house for a while. Grandma and Grandpa agreed to look after the house after the other people left.

There were three bedrooms; one for Mom and Dad, one for Meagan, and one for me. Mom and Dad had brought a few of their favorites from home—my school picture from last year along with Meagan's baby picture and one of Beth when she graduated from high school. Next to them on the wall was a painting of Grandma and Grandpa when they got married. I didn't think that it looked very much like them.

Mom cleaned the walls and floors while Dad moved boxes and furniture around. Dad is strong—he exercises while Meagan takes her nap. "I'm not going to be able to lift her much longer if I don't keep in shape," he teases.

"Honey, why don't you go outside and play?" Mom suggested.

"Mom, I don't know anyone. Anyway, I want to be building snow forts now, not playing outside in shorts." I walked around the apartment. It was a mess. Watson was running around looking at his new home. I found his water and food bowls in a box and fed him. Then I changed my mind and decided to go outside—I
couldn't do anything inside anyway!

I put Watson's leash on him and climbed down the stairs and onto the sidewalk. I thought about home. My friends were probably building snow forts or riding their sleds. I missed my friends. Puerto Rico was boring!

There were a few boys playing catch in the street. I walked over to them and watched. There were sheets of clouds in the sky and there were birds chirping. It was warm out—this was not like Ohio. It was hard to believe that Christmas had only been last week.

"Un perrito," said one of the boys. He had light brown skin and coal black hair. He was looking at me.

"What?" I said.

"Un perrito," he said impatiently. I didn't say anything. "Oh, you are Timmy, the new boy from the States. ¿No? Scott told me of you. You do not speak Spanish. ¿No?" I noticed that he used both English and Spanish.

"Yeah, that's me. And no, I don't know much Spanish."

"Ramon, none of them can speak Spanish!" another boy laughed. He didn't laugh nicely like Jasmine and Mrs. Stevens did. This boy had olive skin and curly hair. "What are you doing in San Juan anyway?"

"My family had to move here."

The boy with the curly hair spoke again. "We know English pretty good. You're lucky. My name is Carlos. This is Ramon and they are Enrique and Scott. What's your dog's name?"

"Watson," I said.

"Where are you from?" Scott asked. By then, Ramon, Carlos, Enrique, and Scott were petting Watson just under his ear, where he likes it.

"I'm from Ohio," I said.

"Oh, I'm from Illinois," Scott offered. "My mom and dad told me about you. They're the ones who picked you up from the airport."

"Oh. So, what are you doing down here?" I asked.

"My mom and dad's work moved us down here. We've been here for three years. Why are you here?"

"My mom's work moved us down here. We'll only be here for a little bit and then we get to go home."

"Oh. You'll like it here," Scott said. He had blonde hair, green
eyes, and freckles.

"Where are you going to school?" This was from Ramon.

"Roosevelt. I start tomorrow."

"That's where we all go," said Scott. He paused for a moment. A distant voice called his name. "I think I hear my mom hollering for me now," Scott said. "It's time for dinner. Do you want to walk to school with us tomorrow?"

"Sure, thanks!"

"We'll meet you right out here at 8:00 A.M. sharp." Scott gave Watson one last pat on the head and ran off.
Chapter 6

"¡Hola, Timmy!" said Mr. Kemp. "I've heard so much about you. Class, this is Timmy, the boy I told you about this morning. Timmy, we've been looking forward to having you in our class. We were just having our social studies lesson. Why don't you sit down in this empty desk and we'll start. Your books are sitting on top of the desk."

I slid into my desk and Mr. Kemp began talking about history. "Ponce de Leon moved to Puerto Rico, looking for gold. The natives fled or were killed. The Spanish began sugarcane plantations and brought in slaves from Africa." I looked around the room. It looked just like the rooms in my old school, but the rest of the building sure didn't. I noticed that while the principal, Miss Ruiz, walked me to the room from her office. The school was all white stone. You got to all the rooms from the outside. There was a walkway that joined them. It was covered, but it was still outside. This school wasn't just an elementary school—it was high school too, only the bigger kids' rooms were far away from us. The music room was below the ground. There were stairs leading down to a cellar, only the stairs were outside also.

I sat by Carlos, Enrique, Scott, and Ramon at lunch. We had rice and beans. "Hey, why aren't you eating much?" asked Carlos.

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know. I guess I just don't eat rice and beans much."

"Well, you better get used to it," he said. "That's what we eat around here. It's better than that Yankee food!"

"Yeah," Ramon agreed. "Better than that American food! My mom won't let me eat that stuff. She says burgers and fries are bad
for you."

I took a bite and laid my fork down. Dad had said he would try to cook my favorite meal for dinner. I couldn't wait to get home and have a hamburger.

There were two girls at the next table. One had red hair and freckles. The other had long, black hair and light brown skin. She was pretty.

On the way out to recess, Scott talked to me while no one else was listening. "Timmy, I noticed you looking at Ana at lunch. Things are different here. Girls and boys don't talk to each other much. That's just the way it is."

The guys started dividing up teams when we got outside. "Can you play baseball, Timmy?" Enrique asked.

"Yeah." We played baseball a little at home, but I liked football much better.

I didn't do so well. Carlos was the pitcher. He was great. Enrique and Scott both got on base. "Come on Timmy, hit it out of here!" Enrique yelled when I came up to bat. Carlos threw the ball and I swung at it. I missed. This happened three times and I struck out.

"Yankee boy can't hit!" yelled Carlos.

"My name isn't Yankee."

"OK, I'll call you something else. ¡Gringo! Is that better?"

"My name is Timmy. If you want to talk to me, that's what you call me!" I yelled. I turned around and ran off. Carlos was mean and I didn't want to play with him any more.

I went over to where some of the girls were playing hopscotch. I saw the girl that was by us at lunch. She was good! Pretty soon, Enrique and Scott came over.

"Hey, what's that girl's name?" I asked.

"Her name is Ana," Enrique said. "She's Carlos' girlfriend. Stay away from her."

"I thought you didn't have girlfriends here."

"Most people don't. Carlos does, but his parents don't know. It's a secret." Enrique said.

I remembered what happened during the baseball game. "What does gringo mean?"

"It means foreigner and it's not a very nice word. Hey man, Carlos didn't mean anything by it," Scott said. "He's mean sometimes, but he's OK."
"Yeah, well, I don't like Carlos. He's a dumb head."
"What's that?" Enrique asked.
"It's what Carlos is. He doesn't know anything, but he acts so smart. I don't like Carlos at all!

* * *

We had fish and pineapple for dinner. "Sorry, Partner," Dad said. "I went to the store today. They had ground beef for hamburgers, but it was too expensive. This was the best I could do."
"It's OK, Dad. We'll have it some other time. I love pineapple, though."
"So, how was school today?" Mom asked. "Did you make any friends?"
"It was fine," I said. I didn't want to tell them about Carlos and Ramon. "There are two boys that I like. One is Scott."
"Oh, is he Jasmine and Tom's son?" Dad asked.
"Yes, he is. He's really cool."
"That's great, Honey. We knew you would make plenty of friends here," Mom said.
"How was your day, Nicole?" Dad asked.
"Oh, it was fine. Jasmine and Tom introduced me to everyone that I'll be working with. They all seem nice. I can't wait to start my research. What did you do all day?"
"Well," Dad said, "Meagan and I had a great day. We went to the store and then to the beach. She walked in the water up to her ankles, but when she could feel the sand moving around her feet, she got scared and ran off. So we came home. She took a nap and I got some writing done."

I was quiet during dinner because I had a lot of things going through my head. I remembered Carlos and Ramon being mean to me. I also remembered Enrique and Scott and the teachers going out of their way to make me feel at home. Most of all, I remembered Ana. I could almost see her long black hair falling around her face as she played hopscotch. I couldn't wait until tomorrow, when I could go back to school and see Scott, Enrique, and Ana.

* * *

After dinner, I went to my room. Watson followed me. "Here
boy!" I said. "Come play with me. It's nice to have a friend that's nice to me. I missed you at school today. What did you do all day?" I rubbed him behind his ears. He lifted his tail and licked my hand. Watson is fun, but I needed someone to talk to. I didn't want to talk to Mom and Dad because I didn't want to tell them that my day hadn't been as good as I had told them. They really thought I was going to love it in Puerto Rico. I went over to my desk and pulled out some paper. I decided to write to Beth.

Dear Beth,

How are you? Are your classes going well? I am fine, but I miss you a lot. I also miss Grandma and Grandpa and my friends. Watson is doing well. I think he is getting used to Puerto Rico too. I take him for lots of walks, and he has friends along the street that we live on.

Today was my first day of school. I met some boys yesterday and I walked to school with them today. Two of them were really nice. Their names are Scott and Enrique. I think Enrique means Steve in English. Scott's parents picked us up from the airport. They work with Mom.

A few kids weren't very nice to me though. Two boys, Carlos and Ramon, made fun of me for not being able to speak Spanish. They also couldn't believe that I didn't like their food. They played baseball at recess. I tried to play with them, but I'm not very good. I'd rather be playing football.

Something else happened today. I met a girl. Her name is Ana. She is smart and seems really nice. Scott told me not to talk to her. She's Carlos's girlfriend. That's supposed to be a secret because boys and girls here don't talk to each other. Their parents don't like it. Scott's from Illinois. He has been living here for a few years. I have to go to bed soon. I miss you.

Love,

Timmy
I addressed the letter to Beth and sealed the envelope. I left it on the kitchen table for Mom. She had told me that she would mail it for me at work in the morning.
Chapter 7

The next day at recess, I watched Ana jump rope. She saw me and came over. The girl that I had seen the day before was with her again. "Hi. I'm Ana. This is Nancy," she said. "You're Timmy, right?" Ana's tanned cheeks turned pink as she spoke to me.

"Yeah, I'm Timmy," I answered.

"You don't talk as bad as Carlos said you do," she giggled. "What are you doing? Don't you want to play with the boys?" she asked.

"Nah," I said. "They're playing baseball and I don't like baseball too much."

"Oh. Well, do you want to jump rope with us?" Nancy asked.

"Uh. . .yeah, sure," I said. I had never jumped rope before, but I had watched the girls do it at home. Besides, Ana was doing it.

Ana and Nancy each held an end of the rope and I began jumping in the middle. They chanted something but I did not know what it meant. They were singing, "uno, dos, tres, cuatro," when I messed up. Just then, Carlos walked by. "Little sissy gringo is playing jump rope with the girls. What's the matter, can't play boy games?" he said. He walked away and Ana and Nancy followed him.

I saw Enrique and Scott playing and walked over to see what they were doing. They each had a top with a string tied around it. They were keeping hold of the string, but letting the top go. They had a contest to see who could make the top spin the longest. Scott could even pick it up while it was moving and put it in his hands. "Hey, can I play with you?" I asked.

"Sure. Do you know how to play?" asked Enrique.
"No, but I learn fast. How do you do it?"

He showed me how he did it. "But remember, throw it quickly or it won't work," he said. I threw the top. It bounced off the ground and stopped. I tried it a few more times and still couldn't get it to work. Scott and Enrique showed me how to do it again. I watched their hands and wrists and tried to do what they did. The next time I spun the top, it stayed spinning for a few seconds, but not as long as when Scott and Enrique did it. We spent the rest of recess playing with the tops.

It didn't seem like a long time before the school year ended. I guess that when you only go to a school for half of a school year, it goes quickly. Not much had changed from the first week. Scott and Enrique and I were friends. Carlos and Ramon called me names and made fun of me, so I tried to avoid them like Dad told me to. Ana looked at me and smile sometimes, but she normally looked down at her feet. Girls in Puerto Rico sure were confusing.

* * *

About two weeks after school got out, Mom handed me a letter when I got home from playing with Scott. "Here you go, Timmers. A letter from Beth."

I forgot about my snack and ran up to my room. I shut my door, threw my bag on the floor, and fell down onto the bed. I opened the letter and began reading.

Dear Timmers,

I was so happy to see your letter. Thanks for writing to me. I'm sorry it took me so long to write back to you. It didn't take me long to get your letter, so I hope this doesn't take long to get to you either — I was hoping you would get this before I got to San Juan. It was good hearing about what you're doing in Puerto Rico. I'm doing fine in school. I had a few tests this week, but nothing that I can't handle. The weather here has been like usual. One day, I'm wearing shorts. The next day, I'm wearing long pants and a light jacket. I wish Mother Nature would
make up her mind!

I'm glad to see that you're making friends. I knew you would. Know what? You'll make many more before you leave. I'll bet that you're sad when you come back home! Don't worry about the boys that are being mean to you. They're used to kids who know how to speak Spanish, that's all. I'm sure they'll get to know you better and will like you. You're hard not to like.

Do you still like Ana? Does she talk to you at all? Does she talk to any boys at all? I bet she's thinking about you even if she doesn't talk to you.

Tell me everything that you're doing. I don't want to miss any of it. This really is neat, Timmy. Most of my friends would kill to be able to live somewhere like that. Tell everyone I said hi and that I will see them soon.

I better go! Hang in there—you're going to have so much fun! I miss you!

Love,
Beth
Chapter 8

Two days after I received Beth's letter, Mom, Dad, Meagan, and I went to pick her up from the airport. We stood at the end of the accordion-like tunnel until we saw her. Beth gave everybody hugs and kisses.

"Timmy, Meagan, you two weren't supposed to do any growing until I got here! You both grew a ton. I've missed you all!"

We went to get Beth's luggage. After waiting for what seemed like an eternity, we found Beth's matching grey suitcases, and loaded them into the car. Then we were on our way to show Beth our new home!

* * *

Mom, Dad, Beth, Meagan, and I did lots around Puerto Rico that summer. Mom arranged her work hours so that she could do some sightseeing with us. There was a lot to see. We went to the beach a lot. The beaches there were a lot different from the beaches that I had seen in Florida. We had a favorite beach that we liked to go to on Saturdays. There was so much to do there. We could go swimming in either the pool or the beach, take tennis lessons, learn how to make crafts with palm leaves, or ride bikes. For lunch, we would buy something from a food stand. They sold frituras (fritters), surrillitos de maiz (corn dogs), and fruits that weren't usually found in Ohio grocery stores, like mangoes. We went there at least once a week during the summer and sometimes during the school year also. The only thing I didn't like about the beaches in Puerto Rico was the sand. Sometimes, it would get really windy
and the sand would blow around. It stung when it hit my face.

On the way home from the beach, we would sometimes buy chicken or pork from a street vendor. There were trucks along the road with racks full of them. Sometimes we bought a sandwich and ate it there. Sometimes we bought a lot of it to take home and cook for dinner. We also liked to buy coco frio from street vendors. The vendors would slice a coconut in half or poke a hole in it to get the milk out of it. You could drink it out of a coconut half with a straw in it. But, sometimes, we would just stop for pizza on the way home from the beach.

Mom's favorite place to go was a tropical rain forest called El Yunque. It was about an hour from our apartment in San Juan. I didn't like it much because it always looked like it was going to rain there. When we went there, we saw waterfalls and did a lot of hiking. That's what Mom liked about it—the hiking. She also like all of the different kinds of animals that could be found there. Everything was colorful in El Yunque. The grass and leaves were kelly green and the bromeliad plants were a deep orange. From the top of the hills there, we could see all the way to the ocean.

My favorite place to visit in Puerto Rico was El Moro, a fort. Beth told me that was built hundreds of years ago. The walls were really thick and there was a lighthouse. It was on a cliff looking over the ocean and it had lots of cannons. I liked to sit on top of the cannons and to pretend I was a watchman looking for enemy ships coming to attack San Juan. Sometimes, Dad and I would fly kites at the fort.

Mom and Dad became good friends with Jasmine and Tom, so it made seeing Scott easy. We would go to their house for dinner or they would come to ours. Sometimes we had food the way they cooked it in Puerto Rico, like rice with beans and fruit for dessert, but sometimes we liked to eat the kind of food we normally ate at home. There was a Burger King nearby, and we went there often.
Chapter 9

Scott's eleventh birthday was in July, and his parents had a party for him. Enrique and I went over to his house and spent the night with him. We went to a pool and played Marco Polo first. Then we went to see "Home Alone" at the movie theater. I thought that was funny. "Home Alone" was already on video at home, but the movie theaters in Puerto Rico were just playing it. The movie was in English, but had the words written out in Spanish. I had never seen a movie like that before. When we got home, Jasmine and Tom brought out Scott's birthday cake. It was in the shape of a baseball and mitt.

After we sang "Happy Birthday" and ate cake, we played games for awhile, and then, we went into Scott's room and got into our sleeping bags.

"So, did you guys like the movie?" I asked.
"Yeah," Scott said. "I liked it when the one robber burned his hand. It served him right!"
"You know, that movie was out in the movie theaters in the States a few months ago. It's already on video there," I said.
"That's weird," Scott added.
"Guys," Enrique asked, "What's it like in the States? My aunt and uncle always say they'd like to go there. They say they could make lots of money there and then move back home."
"It's great, but a lot different from San Juan," I said.
"It sure isn't anything like down here," Scott added. "The weather is a lot different. It's cold. Well, right now, it's probably 85 or 90 degrees, but not as humid as it is here. In the winter, it gets..."
really cold. The sun doesn't shine as much, and it snows."
"Snow. How wonderful snow must be!" Enrique squealed. 
"What is it like?"
"It's fun, but a pain sometimes," I replied. "When it snows, you can roll the snow up into balls the size of a baseball and have snowball fights. Or, you can roll it up into bigger balls and make a man out of the snow. Sometimes when it snows a lot, they have to call school off because the roads get icy and slippery."
"Tell me what kind of games you play there."
"Well, my favorite game is football. We play that a lot at recess. We also like to play kickball and run races."
"What is kickball?" he asked.
"You might like it. It is a little like baseball. Instead of using a bat, you kick a ball and run to base. There are players in the field, and they try to catch the ball and get you out at base, just like baseball. We should get a bunch of guys together and play sometime."

I noticed that Scott hadn't talked for a long time. I looked over at him and noticed his deep, even breaths. Enrique noticed also, so we quit talking and went to sleep.

* * *

I was tired when I got home the next day. Scott, Enrique, and I had been up talking really late the night before. I sat down to lunch with Mom. Dad was in Meagan's room putting her down for her nap.
"Mom," I asked.
"What, Timmers?" she answered.
"I was wondering about something. Enrique told us last night that his aunt and uncle would like to move to New York. They think that if they move there, they will make a lot of money. Then, when they have a lot of money, they want to move back to Puerto Rico."
"Honey, a lot of people in Puerto Rico would like to do that. There are a lot of Puerto Ricans in New York right now, trying to make money."
"But why? Don't they make money here?"
"Many of them do, but some of them can't. Even if they can, they may not get paid enough to support a family. There are a lot of
poor people here, Timmy. A lot of them aren't paid very well at all."

"That's really sad. Are those the people who want to move to New York?"

"Mostly." Mom sighed. "Some people move because they think they can make more money in New York. Unfortunately, most of those people aren't any better off there than they were here. There are other people, though, who go to the United States to go to college. These may be people with more money who think that it means a lot to get an American college education. Many of the kids at Roosevelt School are there to learn English well so that they can go to college in the States."

Dad walked in the room. "I finally got your sister to go to sleep," he said. "How would you like to play checkers with me, Timmy?"

"Sure, Dad!" I yelled, and went to get the checker board.
Chapter 10

When school started in August, I was happy. This year, I had Mrs. Rivera, or Señora Rivera, as she sometimes called herself. She was really strict with us. We weren't ever allowed to talk out loud in her class unless she called on us. Carlos and Ramon got in trouble for whispering a lot. That made me glad that Mrs. Rivera was so strict. She assigned seats and Ana sat right next to me. Scott and Enrique were both on the other side of the room, though.

At recess on the first day back, Enrique asked if Scott and I could teach him kickball. We took a ball outside, but there were no lines on the concrete to play with. We put some large rocks where the bases would be. Most of the boys in our class surrounded us. Some of the fifth-graders watched us too.

"OK, here's how you play kickball," Scott said. "You get into two equal teams, just like in baseball. One team plays the field and the other team is up to bat, only, instead of batting, you kick the ball. The positions for the team in the field are just like baseball. We'll call them the same names to make it easier for you. There is a pitcher. He rolls the ball to the kicker, but on the ground. If the kicker kicks the ball, he starts running the bases. The fielders try to get him out just like in baseball--you have to touch his body with the ball."

"This is where it's different from baseball," I added. "More than one person can be on a base at a time. There isn't any sliding. You can also get somebody out by hitting him below the waist with the ball. It sounds easy, but if you aim at somebody and miss, the ball may end up rolling pretty far away. Each team gets three outs an inning. I don't know if it's really called an inning in kickball, but
we've always called it that. OK, let's divide into teams. Kevin, you pick one team; Scott, you pick the other.

Kevin and Scott picked the teams. I was on Scott's team and so was Enrique. Luckily, Carlos and Ramon were on the other team.

My team kicked first. Scott and I were up first, since we knew how to play. Scott got a double and I got a single. Enrique came up next and kicked it. He got out, but Scott scored and I got to second base. The next two kickers got out also.

My team took the field. Carlos insisted on kicking first, "Since I'm the best athlete," he said.

He kicked the ball when it came to him. It went high up into the air. When it started back down, I could tell it was coming to me. I got under the ball, caught it, and threw it immediately to first base. Enrique caught it and tagged Carlos out. Carlos was really mad. "You didn't get me out!" he screamed. "You're lying!"

Señora Rivera had been watching the whole game. "Carlos, Enrique tagged you, fair and square. Now, get back into line. You'll have another turn later."

Thank you, Senora Rivera!

The other team scored two points to take the lead before making the other two outs. Then, my team got up to kick again. The first two boys got out. Then Scott came up. He got a triple. I was next. I kicked a home run, so we scored two and were leading the game again when the inning was over. Recess time was almost over, so I knew that my team may not get to kick again. Kevin was up first. He kicked it high in the air to Scott. Scott caught it and threw it to first base, but it was too late.

Carlos was the next kicker up. He approached the plate. The pitcher rolled the ball. Carlos kicked it really high. It was heading for me. He was almost to first base by the time the ball began falling. From the corner of my eye, I saw him round first base and head towards second. I caught the ball and began to toss it to the second baseman, but I noticed that he wasn't in his position. I was playing center field, so I was only a few yards away from second base. There was only one choice. I gripped the ball and ran toward Carlos. I lunged toward him, the ball in my outstretched hands. I tagged him. Just then, the bell rang. My teammates ran around me and slapped my hand in victory. Carlos stomped his foot and looked right at me with a mean look on his face. But I didn't care. Even Carlos couldn't bother me now.
When we got back into the classroom, Ana looked over at my desk.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," I said.

"I was watching the game on that last play. You did great."

"Oh, thanks. It was nothing. We used to play that all the time at home."

"Do you miss it there?" Ana asked.

"Yeah, sometimes. I like my friends here, but I miss my friends at home and my grandparents and my sister."

"Timmy... Ana..." Mrs. Rivera said. "Class, open your spelling books and turn to page twenty-five."

Ana's face turned bright red, and she bent over her book, turning to the page that we were supposed to be on. I looked over at Carlos. His face had the same expression as it had when I got him out at kickball.

* * *

The next day, the fifth-graders asked the sixth-graders if we would play kickball with them again. Everyone agreed to play except for Carlos.

"It's a dumb game. Kicking a ball that big is easy. What's the point? Baseball's much harder and it's more fun. Besides, gringo thought up the game himself. I bet they don't even play it in the States. Come on, play baseball with me!"

Enrique, Scott, and I walked over to where we had played the day before. Everyone but Carlos and Ramon followed us and we began to play. As we played, I noticed Ramon watching us intently.

Enrique yelled, "Ramon, Carlos, come play with us! We're having so much fun! It gets easier if you practice!"

Ramon looked at Carlos and mumbled something that we couldn't hear. Carlos looked really angry at Ramon. He turned and walked the other way, not looking back.

Ramon walked hesitantly over to where we were playing. He said to me, "Timmy, can I be on your team this time?"

I thought about it for a minute. Ramon had been mean to me when I first moved to San Juan, but only when Carlos was around. Now, Carlos wasn't around, and Ramon had chosen to play with us.
"Sure," I said. "You can kick third, after Scott and Enrique."
"Thanks amigo," he replied.
Yes, I thought to myself. We could be friends.
Scott, Enrique, and Ramon took their turns kicking. Enrique was right—they did all improve at kickball as they got used to it. When I got up, the bases were loaded. Kevin rolled the ball to me. I stepped toward the ball, turned the inside of my foot toward it, and kicked. The ball soared to the other side of the playground. I had scored a homerun. As I rounded the bases, I noticed that Ana and Nancy were watching from the jungle gym.

* * *

Every day for the next week, most of the boys played kickball at recess. Carlos refused to play and was angry with Ramon for playing. "I don't care," Ramon said. "I don't know why he won't play—I think it's fun!" And every day, I noticed Ana and Nancy and many of the other girls watching us from the other side of the playground.

On Friday when I sat down at my desk, Ana smiled shyly at me. "Good morning," she said.
"Hola," I replied.
"Can I ask you something?"
"Sure," I replied.
"I'm having problems speaking English," Ana said. "My mother is upset. She really wants me to be able to speak English like someone from the States she says." Ana's cheeks turned pink and she stopped talking.
"Would you like me to help you?" I asked.
Her face lit up in a wonderful smile. "Could you? I mean, would that be OK?" she asked. "My mother said she would pay you to tutor me."
"Oh, that's OK. I think it would be fun!"
"Great! When can we start?"
"Whenever you want. How about if you come over to my apartment Monday after school? You could just walk home with me."

"I don't know," she said. "My mother would like us to work at my house, I think. She doesn't really like me talking to boys much. Maybe you could come to my house after school."
"Timmy, Ana!" Mrs. Rivera said. "You have plenty of things you could be working on." I hadn't noticed the bell, but it must have already rung. Ana looked down quickly and began doing her work. I looked over at Carlos. He was looking down at his book and scowling.

* * *

After school on Monday, I walked out the door with Ana and Nancy. Ana's house was only a few blocks from the school. Nancy lived next door to her. I had asked Mom and Dad if I could tutor her. "I think that would be great, Partner!" Dad had said. "Maybe she could help you with a little Spanish also."

When we got to Ana's house, her mother met us at the door. "Well, hello," she said to me. "You must be Timmy. Come in and sit down." Ana and I sat down at the kitchen table with her mother.

"So, you're going to help Ana with her English." It was more of a statement than a question.

"Yes," I replied. "As often as she would like—until I leave next summer anyway."

"Where are you going next summer?" Ana's mother asked.
"Back home. We're only here for a year and a half."
"Interesting. Well, what do you think of Puerto Rico?"
"I like it! It's a lot different from home, but it's a good different."

"Well, I don't want to keep you kids from doing your work," she said. "Why don't you stay in here at the table? I will be in the next room if you need anything." With that, she walked out of the room.

So I began tutoring Ana. We were together one night every week. Her mother always sat in the next room. Ana asked me a lot of questions about the States and I learned a lot of Spanish from her.

* * *

I had a lot of friends now at school. Every day at recess, we played tag or kickball. Sometimes we threw tops. I was getting better at that, but I still wasn't as good as Scott, Enrique, and Ramon.

Carlos was still mean to me. The only difference was that
people stuck up for me when he was mean. He didn't like that, so he stopped playing with Scott, Enrique, and Ramon.

I asked Ana about him one night while I was tutoring her.

"He was never my boyfriend," she whispered. "I liked him until he was mean to you. Then I decided that I didn't like him anymore." Then, Ana's mother coughed, reminding us that she was in the next room. We stopped talking about Carlos.
Chapter 11

Christmas came—our first and only Christmas in Puerto Rico. Beth was visiting from college for a few weeks before she had to go back to school. I still thought it was weird having warm weather during December, but my family went to the beach just the same. One night, just as I was getting ready for bed, there was a knock at the door. The door opened and I heard voices -- a lot of them. I heard Mom and Dad talking with some people. I went into Meagan's room where Beth slept when she was visiting. "Beth," I said.

"What, Timmers?" she answered.
"What's going on?"
"I think they're having a Christmas party."
"A party? Why didn't they tell me they were having a party?"
"They didn't know."
"What?" I asked.

"Jasmine and Tom told me about this. During the Christmas season, Puerto Ricans like to have traveling parties. They begin at one house. The adults at that house go onto another house and surprise the people who live there. They eat and drink some more, and then move to another house. They keep getting more and more people at every house. I guess that's what happened here."

"If Mom and Dad didn't know that people were coming, how did they have enough food to feed all of those people?"

"I guess that during December, people here just make sure that they have extra food around, just in case."

There was a knock at the door. "Beth," Dad said. "Mom and I are leaving. We're having one of those Christmas parties that Tom
and Jasmine told us about. Can you keep an eye on Timmy and Meagan for us?"

"Sure Dad. Have fun!"

When Mom and Dad left, Beth and I went into the kitchen. There was food left from when the adults were there. Beth and I both got some food and sat down to the kitchen table.

"I haven't gotten to talk to you much, Timmy." Beth said.

"How are things going for you here?"

"Great!" I said. "I have lots of friends now and we do things together all of the time. Scott and Enrique are still two of my best friends, and I have a new friend. His name is Ramon. He was mean to me at first, but only because he was hanging around Carlos. He stopped hanging around Carlos and started hanging around us now. He's really nice, now that I've gotten to know him."

"So, is Carlos still being mean to you?" she asked.

"Sometimes. Most of the time now, he just ignores us. We don't talk to him, and he doesn't talk to us." I had finished my food and put my fork down.

"Beth," I said, quietly.

"Yes," she replied.

"Do you remember Ana, the girl that I told you about?" Beth nodded her head, so I continued. "She asked me a few weeks ago if I would tutor her in English. Her mother wants her to be able to speak English without much of an accent. I go over once or twice a week and we talk a lot to give her practice."

"That's neat, Timmy. I'm sure that she and her mother appreciate that. How are you two getting along?"

"Fine, I guess," I said. "I really like her. She acts like she might like me too, but I really can't tell. We don't get to talk much privately anyway -- her mother is usually in the next room, and can hear everything that we say."

Just then, Meagan began crying. Beth got up from the table, promised me that we would talk some more in the morning, and left to go take care of Meagan. I cleaned the kitchen table off and went to bed.

* * *

The rest of the school year passed quickly. Watson was full grown now, but was still as playful as he had been when I got him
at Christmas. He slept with me at night. I felt comfortable in Puerto Rico now and wasn't sure that I really wanted to go home to Ohio -- things were much more exciting in Puerto Rico! Still, I missed my friends in Ohio and looked forward to seeing them again.

* * *

One day while sitting in math class, I looked out the window. It was early April and it was raining heavily. It was even harder today to listen to Senora Rivera than normal because the rain was pelting the tin roof. The rain was also flooding the streets like it often does in Puerto Rico. Mom says it is because their drainage systems are bad. I thought of my friends in Ohio for the first time since last summer. They were probably sitting in math class also. I figured it might be raining in Ohio then, but not like it was in San Juan. In Ohio, you couldn't hear the rain on the roof as much, but in Ohio, the playground wouldn't be dry in time for recess like it is in Puerto Rico. That made me glad that I was in Puerto Rico because I wanted to play kickball at recess.

After lunch, Enrique, Scott, Ramon, and I ran out to play kickball. Since the beginning of the school year, we had played kickball almost every day at recess. The other boys were catching on.

We divided up into teams. I was the captain of one team. Ramon was the captain of the other. I picked Scott. Ramon picked Enrique. I picked Miguel. Ramon looked around for someone to pick. The best players were already gone. I noticed Carlos in the back of the group waiting to be picked. So did Ramon. He walked over to Carlos and talked to him quietly. After a minute or so of whispering, Ramon stood in front of his team. "I pick Carlos to be on my team," he said.

Carlos showed no expression. He walked over and stood in line behind Enrique, waiting for the teams to be picked. When everyone was picked to be on a team, we began playing. I would be playing in the outfield when my team was in the field, but I was up first. I got a single. Then, Scott kicked the ball. He got a single and I made it to third base. We ended up scoring one run that inning. The other team tied it up during the next inning. The score remained one to one until there were only a few minutes of recess left. Then Carlos stepped up. Scott pitched the ball to him. Carlos
turned his body toward the ball, and kicked it as hard as he could. The ball soared over the pitcher's head and into the outfield. It was heading right toward me. I calculated where the ball would land and stood there, waiting for the it. The ball went further than I had expected and way over my head. I ran after it. By the time I caught up to the ball and threw it in, Carlos was rounding third base. I threw it to Scott. He caught it and threw it into home plate. Carlos was already there. His team ran over to congratulate him on his homerun. Before they could all slap his hand, the bell rang.

Carlos and I walked into the building side by side.

"I've been practicing," he said.

"I can tell."

"I said it was a dumb game, but I didn't really mean it. I just didn't like it at first because I couldn't play it. Now that I know how to play it, I like it."

"Good, I'm glad you like it," I said. I wasn't sure what Carlos wanted. Did he need to ask me for a favor? Was he talking to me because he didn't have any friends? Was he trying to be nice to me?

"Timmy," he said.

"Yeah," I answered.

"Listen, I'm sorry I was so mean to you. I didn't mean to be, but I know I was. I don't know why--I guess it was because I thought you were... well... different from us. Now, I think you're cool. Anyway, I'm sorry. Do you think we could be friends?"

"Sure," I said. "I would like to be friends, Carlos."

At that point, we walked into the classroom and had to be quiet so Mrs. Rivera didn't get upset with us for talking. I sat down and started getting my books out. I thought about Carlos and our new friendship. I didn't know him very well. I always thought he was so mean, but he had been so nice to me today. Maybe we could be friends after all.
Chapter 12

The summer went by the same way that the summer before had. Beth came to visit for two months. My friends and I enjoyed playing ball in the park and going swimming. Sometimes when we went to the park, I brought Watson, and my friends and I played frisbee with him.

I tutored Ana until July. Then, her mother said that she thought Ana's English was good enough. That night, Ana walked me to the door. Her mother was in her bedroom, so she couldn't hear us.

"Timmy," she said.
"Yes."
"My English isn't good enough yet."
"Ana, your English is fine," I said. "If I didn't know, I would think that you had been speaking it all of your life."
"What I'm saying is that I don't think that's why my mother wants the lessons to stop."
"What are you talking about?" I asked.
"I think my mother is having us stop the English lessons because...because she thinks I like you!" Ana covered her face with her hands, turned, and ran back into her house.

I wondered if Ana's mother was right. Did Ana really like me? I also wondered if I would ever see Ana again. My family would be leaving for the States in August.

***

The week before my family was to leave for Ohio, Mom, Dad,
Meagan, and I tried to go to the places in Puerto Rico that we liked the most. We saw El Moro, El Yunque, and the beach one last time. The night before we left, Scott asked me over to his house to spend the night. Mom and Dad said it was OK because I had already packed all of my things. Tom opened the door.

"Hi Timmy! Are you and Scott going to spend some time together before you leave? It's good to see you. Come on in. I think Scott's in his bedroom. You can go on back."

I walked down the hallway and toward Scott's room. Scott was sitting on his bed reading a book. I knocked on his door and walked in. "Surprise!" I heard several voices yell. Enrique, Ramon, and Carlos had been hiding in Scott's closet and under his bed.

"What's going on?" I asked. "What do you think?" Scott asked. "This is your going away party. Are you surprised?"

"Wow! I sure am! No one has ever had a surprise party for me before. Thanks, guys."

Scott, Enrique, Carlos, Ramon, and I had a good time that night talking, eating, and watching movies. I didn't want to leave the next morning when I woke up, but wanted to help Mom, Dad, and Meagan pack.

***

Jasmine, Tom, and Scott took us to the airport. "Jasmine, how long will you be in Puerto Rico?" I asked. "Oh, I don't know. Probably for another year or two," she said. "Timmy, maybe you can come visit us next summer. I know you'd like to see Scott and your other friends again."

Mom, Dad, Jasmine, and Tom walked ahead of Scott and me. We stopped to talk alone. "Well, bye, Timmy," he said. "I hope you can come and visit. Hey, maybe I can come visit you next summer in Ohio! I haven't seen my grandparents or friends from Illinois for a long time. Maybe Mom and Dad would let me visit you all."

"Yeah, that would be great," I agreed. "Well, you have my address. Write, OK? Man, I wish I could stay here longer. Ohio is so boring."

"Timmy, it's time to go!" Dad shouted. "The plane's going to leave without us."

We walked through the metal detector, down the accordion
hallway, and up the stairs to the plane. This time, no stewardess talked to me or took me up to see the pilot. I guess I looked older. I sure felt older. It had been a year and a half since I got on the plane to come down to Puerto Rico. I had gotten taller and changed a lot. I had my first crush on a girl and had made a lot of friends.

We sat in our seats. This time, Meagan sat by the window. She was over two years old now. The plane took off. Again, I saw the white beach, covered with people in bathing suits. We went over the same blue ocean and back towards Ohio.

* * *

Mom drove me to school the next week. "Mom, I don't want to go to school today. I think I feel sick," I said.

"Timmy," Mom said, "junior high is so much fun. You'll make plenty of friends, just like you did in Puerto Rico. And you still have your friends from before. Matt will be there. So will Amanda, Josh, and Adam. Maybe you'll even see Juan. You two will have a lot to talk about now."

* * *

I climbed out of the car and walked towards the junior high school. It was big--bigger than any of the schools that I had been in before. I walked through the double doors and stopped, realizing that I didn't know where my homeroom was. Where was a teacher when you needed one?

"Timmy, is that you?" I heard someone ask. There was a group of kids standing near a drinking fountain.

"Matt!" I yelled. "Hey, how are you?"

"Good," he said. "Wow! I haven't seen you in a long time. When did you get home? You haven't been outside at all."

"We got home last week. We've been unpacking and visiting my grandparents since then, so I haven't been out much. Hey, do you know your way around this building?" I asked.

"A little," Matt replied. "There was a new student orientation a few weeks ago. They gave us a tour of the building then. I don't know if I remember anything but my homeroom, though. What room are you in?"

I showed him my schedule. "Cool!" he said. "We have the
same homeroom. Come on, I'll show you the way." We began walking down the long, drably colored hallway.

"Hey," Matt said, "What are you doing this weekend?"
"Nothing," I said. "Why? What's up?"
"I was thinking about having a party. Maybe it could be a coming home party for you. What do you think?"
"That sounds cool. I'll see you there! Right now, I'd better get to my homeroom though. I'll talk to you later."

***

Dad dropped me off at Matt's house after dinner on Friday night. "Timmy, I'll be here at 10:30 to pick you up. Be ready to go then, OK?"
"Sure, Dad," I answered.
I walked in the house. The radio was playing and there were lots of people there. I didn't recognize any of the songs--they hadn't been on the radio in Puerto Rico yet.
I talked to Matt for awhile. Soon, we all began dancing. Then, the door opened and Juan walked in.
"Hey Juan," Josh said. "What are you doing here? I though you had to stay home and wash your hair tonight."
I guess that answered my question. Josh and Adam hadn't stopped picking on Juan. I looked at Juan to see how he reacted to them.
"Yeah, yeah. What's up, Josh?" he asked and grinned. Juan walked over to me. He didn't seem upset -- maybe it was just a joke. Just then, Juan noticed me. "Timmy, how are you? How was San Juan?"
"Great," I said. Juan and I sat and talked about what I had done in Puerto Rico.
"Juan, how have you been?" I asked.
"Great! He said. "I miss San Juan, but I'm happy here too. My dad still says that we may move back home if he can ever save up enough money. Doesn't my English sound better?"
"It sounds great. Juan, when I left, Josh didn't like you. What happened?"
"He made fun of me at first. Then, we got kinda stuck together. My parents met his parents and liked each other. They started doing things together and bringing us along. They didn't
know that we knew each other and didn't get along, so they thought that we might become friends. Eventually, Josh and I began talking because there was nothing else for us to do. We slowly became friends, and now we get along great."

"That's great!" I said. "How long has that been?"

"Oh, a long time -- over a year at least. Everything else has been forgotten about."

"Juan, something has been bothering me. A boy in Puerto Rico made fun of me when I first moved there. I was thinking about you the other night. When Josh made fun of you, I never said anything. I felt sorry for you, but I was afraid to say anything. I'm sorry."

"That's OK, Timmy. You never stood up for me, but you were my friend and that meant a lot to me. I hope we can be friends now. So, tell me everything that you did when you were in Puerto Rico. Where did you go to school? Did you leave the city very much to see other places? Do you miss it now?"

"I loved Puerto Rico and I had a lot of fun. I went to Roosevelt School and made a lot of friends. Every weekend and most of the summer, my family went to a beach or something. You were right--Puerto Rico really is the best place in the world."

"My family is still talking about moving back there if we ever save up enough money. If we do, maybe you can come visit me."

"That would be great," I said. "I hope you do get to go back sometime. I know now how hard it is to be away from your home. I have a few friends there now that I miss already. I would love to visit all of you sometime."