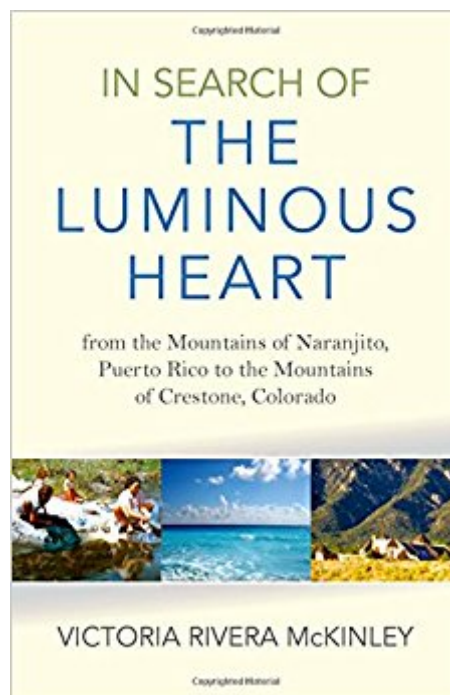




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In Search Of The Luminous Heart: From The Mountains Of Naranjito, Puerto Rico To The Mountains Of Crestone, Colorado



Synopsis

BOOK OF THE MONTH - JuneLas Comadres and Friends National Latino Book ClubBeginning with her family's origins as tenant farmers in the mountains of Puerto Rico at the turn of the nineteenth century, Victoria Rivera McKinley leads readers through dramatic and painful events, which in spite of psychological explanations, add up to experiences that are much larger. Against a historical backdrop of Puerto Rico's changing culture, she shows how a family of ten children survive and learn to look out for one another. This is a success story, but not simply because the author leaves Puerto Rico and becomes a psychotherapist in America. Rivera McKinley offers an extraordinary perspective that finds truth in how each person lives experience in his or her own way. Her own journey ends in the Rocky Mountains, where Buddhist teachings offer her a spiritual and philosophical framework with which to understand her life. In Search of the Luminous Heart is a deep and unusual look at adversity and belies terms like "dysfunctional" for family. Here, generosity of spirit is the key to survival. The family endures by using intelligence, compassion, and accepting lives that have the real taste of tears, blood, songs, and prayers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Victoria Rivera McKinley is a 73-year-old Puerto Rican mother of two married daughters. She is a practicing psychotherapist in NYC. From her early youth she was her family's scribe and longed to one day write their story for the benefit of the future generations.

Victoria Rivera McKinley managed to do the impossible. With much time and much effort, she did

something we all long to do but never take the time to do - retrace the steps of time. After separating herself from her Puerto Rican family of farmers to come to New York and establish herself a well known psychotherapist, she went back to tribute the family never truly got to know. A strong woman near retirement goes back to Puerto Rico to study her family's past and not only that. She even writes a book in her second learned language telling us all about the wonderfully different and beautiful characters that make up her family. Victoria gives hope to anyone new to America - you don't have to lose touch with where you come from to make it here. She gives hope to anyone who wants to rekindle family relations with long lost relatives, or even relatives that just seem too different culturally to ever understand. She found a new direction not only in America as a psychotherapist, but also religiously. Her new religion was frowned upon by relatives taking a toll on Victoria and her relations with family. Thankfully, Victoria shows us through her peaceful way of thinking, where she looks only for the heart of her family and others, that her differences with her family were possible to overcome. She shows us that there is a luminous heart in us all.

I loved this book and recommend it with all my heart for all the reasons cited by previous reviewers. (In case anyone is wondering why I give it 4 stars only, here are my 2 reasons: First, precisely because there ARE so many wonderful reasons to praise the book. Although I have no statistics to back this statement, I believe that a big share of 1st books are autobiographical, either outright memoirs or memoirs-dressed-up-fiction. Given their own lives as their subjects, first time authors have so many stories to tell, so much first-hand knowledge and insight to share, that, as with the present book, the final work lacks the clarity and unity of style that is a hallmark of 5-star literary perfection. The second reason is a matter of principle. Even the works of great authors usually have their detractors. It follows therefore that if I were someone considering whether or not to buy a book by a little known author that had received only 5-star ratings, I would assume that all the reviews were written by family and friends of the author whose high praise was driven by a desire to help the author. Skewing the average by only I hope will give the book a better chance of finding the wide readership it deserves. . . and avoids dismissal by would-be readers as a book that only a family member would love. The "luminosity" elements of the book--love, faith, family, courage are a just a few--have been cited eloquently and thoroughly by previous reviewers. But there are so many other interesting aspects of this admirable first-time effort that I am going to use "my space" to list some of other virtues of this very good--if not perfect--book. 1) No prior review I think has cited the book's right to be classified as a family saga--a rags-to-riches story that spans five generations and more than a century, from the hardscrabble lives of the author's grandparents, unlanded and

impoverished farm-workers in a primitive mountain community of Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 20th century, to the contemporary, farflung and privileged worlds that are all that her own and her siblings' grandchildren have known. 2) One reviewer already praised the author for her careful attention to the effects of local and national historical events on Puerto Rico and the members of her family. As I read, I was riveted by what I was learning about 20th Century Puerto Rican--even as I was often embarrassed to realize how little I knew about this US territory.3) On yet another level, "...The Luminous Heart" is an insightful and perceptive ethnographic study of how a family, a community and a society as adapts to dramatic changes in its social, economic and political fabric. 4) As has been happens in many cultures, the academic, professional and personal achievements of the author and her seven siblings far exceeded those of their parents. As I read, I found myself pondering the age-old debate about the respective roles played by nature and nurture in shaping the people we become. Did the author's parents have innate, genetic talents that never emerged due to the constrictions of the social order into which they were born and the severely limited opportunities they had to flourish? If so, it is reasonable to assume that their children inherited the genes and found their way to social environments where these traits were allowed to emerge? On the other hand, the achievements of the second generation could have had nothing to do with their parents but were the shaped by their exposure to greater social freedom and social opportunities that far-exceeded those that their parents encountered. In the end, Ms. Rivera McKinley has created a literary gem with elements to pique the interest of multitudes of readers. My hope is that word of mouth will get it into the hands of enough people to build a following. For my part, I purchased 3 copies of the book and gave them to three people I work with who are of Puerto Rican descent. The personalities of the three are very different and while each has acknowledged a strong feeling of connection to Puerto Rico, the focus of interest is very different in each. I have asked each to post a comment on , or at least tell me their reactions to "... The Luminous Heart" so I can post their reactions in the present forum. I recommend that other fans of the book likewise send copies of the book for more reactions . . . and that replenish its dwindling stock.

I thought to write the definitive review on Victoria's book, but having read the other reviews I was struck by their excellence and comprehensive nature. Victoria's memoir may be seen from a spiritual perspective, one of identity and assimilation, a rise from great poverty(of economic resources, not spiritual, familial, and cultural ones), a person's struggle to achieve belongingness and relatedness to family and to the world, the healing power of love and forgiveness, the necessity of suffering in achieving wisdom and self-knowledge. The work of achieving spiritual development,

wisdom and also a loving and healthy family is never finished and one must be open to revision and openness to change of opinion, relatedness, thought and identity. The luminous heart, i.e. the soul, is always open to revision and change, for love, meaning and identity, in this often brutally punishing world, may only be maintained by a willingness to encounter all its reality, dialogue in its own language with understanding, and profoundly reconcile with its being in a caritative act of love. For it is faith, unconditional faith (not hope, for our desires, and thoughts of what is or may be good, are often never realized but faith is eternal) which enables us to sense the presence of the One Supreme, and the possibility of redemption. This is the nature and thread of what Victoria illustrates in her memoir. Another aspect of the memoir which I found invaluable was the description of life in Puerto Rico, still in the grips of the Depression after WWII, and how the "ordinary" people managed this in "extraordinary" ways, in solidarity and relatedness. Much of this has vanished(though not altogether) from Puerto Rico and these United States and it is good that we remember. John A. Munoz, Ph.D.

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