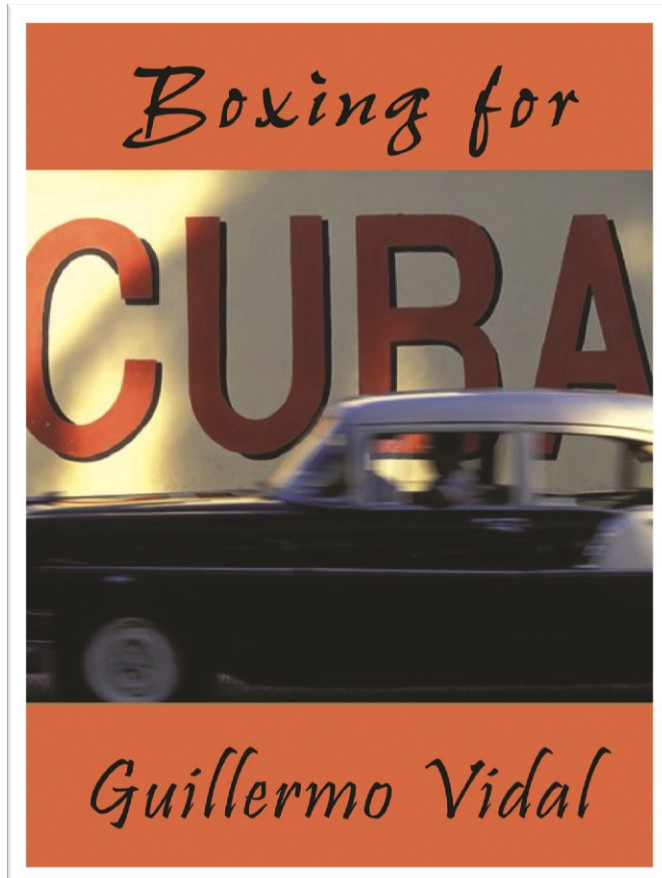


**A Highly Acclaimed Memoir
Poised To Become A Major Motion Picture**

In the end, I know I believe in the truth of an old Cuban saying more than I believe in anything else: No hay mal que por bien no venga. Even out of the worst of it all, good things come.



In the rich tradition of *Angela's Ashes* comes a haunting story of a childhood—and a life—shaped by the Cuban revolution and the exodus of thousands of children to America in what became known as Operation Peter Pan.

Guillermo Vidal's *Boxing for Cuba* tells the heart-breaking story of how Cuban parents—at war with each other every bit as much as they raged against Fidel Castro—made the nearly inconceivable decision in the midst of the chaos of 1961 to send their three

young sons away to an unknown land, where they ultimately were isolated in a grim Colorado orphanage.

It's the story of the Vidal family's subsequent attempts to remake their lives as Americans, starting with nothing and three-thousand miles away from the legions of other Cuban refugees who had settled in south Florida, the parents' spirits crushed, their bitterness raking the air of their home like an angry wind, the three boys thriving in time despite their mother and father's enduring grief over their lost lives. And this is the story, too, of Vidal's eventual return to his homeland, a journey he began in hope of discovering what his life would have been like had he remained in Cuba, a sojourn during which he discovered a

vital part of himself he had left behind and a deep appreciation for the people and culture of his island home.

A gifted and lyrical storyteller, Vidal—currently the mayor of Denver, Colorado—cinematically portrays a single family’s struggle to survive world-changing political events. By turns horrifying, comic, and deeply moving, *Boxing for Cuba* is a story that eloquently reminds us that people matter more than governments and that out of the worst of experiences, lives can be redeemed and lived with new understanding and humane resolve.



As a young child in Camagüey in central Cuba, Guillermo Vidal experienced the great hope his middle-class parents first felt as Castro’s revolution swept the island nation, and then their subsequent fear of imprisonment or worse once it became clear that free enterprise and freedom of expression would not be part of the new regime. His parents sent Vidal and his two brothers to the U.S. in 1961 via “Operation Peter Pan,” a program that placed over 14,000 children in foster homes or orphanages. Once in the U.S., the Vidal boys were not safe in the arms of family members already in Miami—as their parents believed they would be—but were sent instead to the dreary and violent Sacred Heart Orphanage in Pueblo, Colorado. With communication made almost impossible because of the overt hostility between Cuba and the United States, Vidal’s parents didn’t know where the boys were or how they were faring for more than a year. And the family wasn’t reunited until Vidal’s parents were able to slip out of Cuba and travel to Colorado via Mexico four years later.

The Vidal family endured culture shock, financial hardships, loss of family ties, discrimination, and the myriad difficulties that commonly come with being immigrants in a foreign land. After a time, they were able to make a new life for themselves that was very different from their former life in Cuba or the lives

they might have lead had they remained, yet always their days remained etched with grief and the constant memory of their truest home.

“This is the best book I have read in ages. Guillermo Vidal's is a remarkable life. I was heartbroken at the finish, not from the story, but because I had no more to read. A lyrical and magical book.”

Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper

This is a haunting coming of age story that reads like a Dickensian novel, though it is all true. A Cuban boy loses both his family and his country, survives several years in an American orphanage, and emerges to become a civic leader in Colorado. At the same time, he offers us a unique and enlightening vantage point on the explosive relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. Both narratives are so seamlessly intertwined that it reads as if they are one.”

Helen Thorpe, author of *Just Like Us*

“The painful narrative of Boxing for Cuba is made bearable because the narrator's voice is the voice of a natural storyteller. Guillermo Vidal is a witness, and now recounts those years with the attention to detail that makes history and the turbulence of those months come alive.

Olga Karman, author of *Scatter My Ashes Over Havana*

From “La Pescera,” Boxing for Cuba:

I WAS AWAKENED by my mother's crying on the morning of September 29, 1961. Instinctively, I understood that I was not overhearing the dénouement of one of her battles with Papi. His genuine attempt to console her, and the sadness that hung in the air like fog made it clear to me before I was out of bed that the unnamed and never-spoken-of day had arrived, and that neither Mami nor Papi really wanted to be putting us on an airplane without them. I don't remember eating breakfast that morning, or even dressing. All I remember is holding tightly to each of them as they helped me prepare for a day whose end none of us could quite envision. I was numb and I cried continually, and every sweet pleasure of the preceding days already had vanished, replaced by a sense that I was about to die.

Mami carefully weighed each of our three duffle bags with a bathroom scale—we were allowed only sixty pounds each of luggage—then we made the short journey to the Havana airport. Locally known as *La Pescera*, the aquarium, the passenger waiting-area at the airport’s terminal was an all-glass enclosure that swept up to a high and brightly lit ceiling. Kiko, Toto, and I, we were told, would be required to enter *La Pescera* quite soon, and wait there alone for our flight. We were stunned to learn that we would have to say our goodbyes so quickly, but Mami explained that she and Papi could watch us through the glass until we were safely on our way. Then, silently, the two of them tenderly hugged each one of their sons, holding each of us as tightly as they could, kissing our faces, our heads, our necks, my skin soon wet with our blended tears. My heart was breaking, but, like the others, I had no idea what I could possibly say. It all seemed so impossible to understand; we were strangely acquiescing to such an unimaginable event, and then Papi sensed that perhaps a few words could offer us comfort. “We’ll all be back together in two or three months at the most,” he assured us. “The United States is not going to allow this to go on much longer and will get rid of Fidel.” We nodded in response and he said nothing more. We hugged Mami and Papi a final time, then, crying bitterly, Kiko, Toto, and I made our way into the glass aquarium.

THE HOURS WE waited in *La Pescera* were torture. The enclosure was filled with dozens of children who were every bit as frightened as we were, and the sounds of their crying echoed off the glass walls that now entrapped us. The people who processed our paperwork—dressed in army fatigues and draped with rifles and bullets—were officious and brusque and utterly uninterested in trying to calm anyone’s fears. They searched each of us, tore into our duffle bags, spilled their contents across an ocean of tables, then left us to try to sort out our belongings from everyone else’s and repack them. I had turned ten only two months before and had little experience of life, but these were the most ruthless people I’d ever encountered, and I remember thinking as well—with perhaps the first spark of compassion of my brief years—that I would be sure to convince Papi to free the fish in his aquarium



once we returned home: if this place were a glimpse of how those fish were forced to live, we would have to let them go.

At last we found a place where we could see Mami and Papi through the glass. We pressed against it, and they came close on the other side, and the three of us were comforted to be close to them again, the glass wall separating us but allowing us almost to touch, the three of us moving our open palms to the glass where their palms already were pressed hard, repeatedly mouthing *te quiero*, I love you, none of us able to take our eyes off each other until the moment when we could wait no longer and were forced to walk to the plane.

We walked backward as we boarded the Pan American DC-7 so we could continue to keep our eyes locked on our parents, and the pain I felt in my heart as I watched them recede made it seem certain that I was about to die. Mami and Papi moved to the terminal's rooftop observation deck, and when we were seated, we could see them again as the plane turned toward the runway. The cabin was filled with the cries of children, and I remember thinking that if I closed my eyes, perhaps God would come to take me away.

But with my eyes shut, the crying and whimpering only seemed to grow louder, and God chose to show me no mercy. I looked at Kiko, at Toto, and none of us could utter a word, but we could see the shared expressions of fear and overwhelming sadness on each other's faces, and then we could see Mami and Papi on the terminal roof. In the seat beside the window, I kept my eyes utterly fixed on them as the plane taxied down the runway, gathered speed, then finally lifted into the air. We were leaving them, and I watched my mother and father as my heart split in half, seeing each of them grow smaller and smaller until at last they were indistinguishable from the island of Cuba itself.



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