



I Wanna Be Your Shoebox

Cristina García

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Because Yumi Ruíz-Hirsch has grandparents from Japan, Cuba, and Brooklyn, her mother calls her a poster child for the twenty-first century. Yumi would laugh if only her life wasn't getting as complicated as her heritage. All of a sudden she's starting eighth grade with a girl who collects tinfoil and a boy who dresses like a squid. Her mom's found a new boyfriend, and her punk-rock father still can't sell a song. She's losing her house; she's losing her school orchestra. And worst of all she's losing her grandfather Saul.

Yumi wishes everything could stay the same. But as she listens to Saul tell his story, she learns that nobody ever asks you if you're ready for life to happen. It just happens. The choice is either to sit and watch or to join the dance.

National Book Award finalist Cristina García's first middle-grade novel celebrates the chaotic, crazy, and completely amazing patchwork that makes up our lives.

I Wanna Be Your Shoebox Details

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From Reader Review I Wanna Be Your Shoebox for online ebook

Katie Bruce says

Well-written with a super endearing main character. Yumi is part Cuban, part Japanese and part Russian Jew, but this book isn't really about that...it's more to do with her relationships with her family, friends, and how the heck to save the school orchestra. Although I really liked this book, I have a feeling this may be one that appeals more to adults than to kids.

Terry says

I liked this book a lot more than I thought I was going to. It's about a multiracial girl (part Russian Jew, Japanese, Guatemalan, and Cuban) who's having a hard time in life. Her parents are divorced, her dad's depressed, her mom's got a new boyfriend, they're getting kicked out of their beachfront apartment, her grandfather is sick, one of her guy friends has a crush on her, and, to top it all off, the orchestra she plays in at school is getting cut. The author ably weaves these different things together into an interesting story that makes you feel for the main character. My primary criticism revolves around the author's handling of an international adoption that the main character's aunt has in the story ... you just can't go online and pick out a healthy baby from an orphanage's website. Some basic research would have brought this fact to life. And then the author has the aunt cram stuffed animals in the baby's crib ... they are a serious health hazard and can suffocate the baby. These problems aside, which aren't front-and-center to the storyline, it's an interesting book that will appeal primarily to girls in middle school.

Marjorie Ingall says

Sweet book about a girl from a super-multi-culti background with super-diverse interests (classical music! punk! surfing! family history!). Yumi's beloved dying paternal grandfather is a Brooklyn Jew; her grandmother's Japanese, and her family on her mom's side is Cuban. The super-crammed plot is about Yumi trying to save her school orchestra, cope with her depressed songwriter dad and about-to-remarry mom, deal with boys, wrap her brain around an impending move, process her grandfather's mortality, and I'm sure I'm forgetting 83 or 107 more issues. I didn't find Yumi to be wildly believable, and for me the romantic-triangle part of the super-crammed plot doesn't work at all. But Yumi's a very sweet kid; I liked the grandfather Saul, and the book sails along happily enough. I'd recommend it to any kid from a mixed cultural background who doesn't often see herself reflected in literature.

Morrigan says

"I wanna be your shoebox" is a wonderful book. The plot revolves around Yumi Ruiz-Hirsh, a twelve year old that is half Cuban, quarter Jewish, quarter Japanese and some Guatemalan thrown in there. She is a surfer, plays the clarinet, loves Mozart, the Ramones and punk music and lives in California. Needless to say, she has an interesting background. Her parents are divorced and her mom is a somewhat famous writer and her father plays in a band and tunes piano as a side job.

Yumi visits her grandparents every week, Saul and Hiroko. When Yumi learns that Saul is dying from cancer (at 92) she insists he tells her his life's story. Through these tales they strengthen their relationship and Yumi learns important life lessons.

Yumi and her classmates must also fight to raise money for their music program which was canceled because the school could not afford it.

The book is very well written and is a great story about an interesting girl dealing with the impending death of her grandfather, her mother's new boyfriend, school and all the things associated with teenage life. Yumi is quite mature (for her age) and although she behaves like a teenager and has some teenage angst, Cristina Garcia gave her quite the interesting voice (in the narrative). It was a refreshing book to read. It was simple, exceptionally written and quite the enjoyable read. This is a book for all ages, and people of all ages will enjoy it.

Amanda Harrison says

I Wanna Be Your Shoebox is a book that ends up being less than the sum of its part. Following Yumi Ruíz-Hirsch as she deals with her grandfather who is suffering from terminal cancer, an orchestra program that was shut down, learning to surf, moving, and dealing with boys all while living as a multiracial preteen in California.

Yumi's school year is very eventful, but also piecemeal. Actions happen, but don't seem particularly seem to mesh well with the overall story. When cops show up and a helicopter flies overhead looking for a missing Yumi, we never exactly find out the resolution, even though the book continues. In addition, some storylines, such as Yumi's relationship with her grandfather is fully fleshed out, but others, such as her relationship with her crush, Quincy seem added on as an afterthought.

The audiobook does not add to the reading experience. While the narrator attempts to offer different accents for different characters, it isn't followed through throughout the whole book.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by JodiG. for TeensReadToo.com

Everybody has one perfect moment in time upon which they will someday look back and think, "that was when everything changed." For Yumi Ruíz-Hirsch, that moment is here.

Yumi lives in a perfect cross-blend of cultures and ethnicity that make her so identifiable to teenagers today. What is there in the world that can't be tackled by a part-Jewish, part-Cuban, part-Japanese, American girl? Plenty.

First of all, Yumi has just found out that her grandfather, Saul, is dying of cancer. Yumi is closer to Saul than anyone else. Even at ninety-two years old, she can't believe that he only has months to live and she asks him to tell her about his life.

While dealing with the threat of losing Saul, Yumi also finds herself facing other changes and challenges in her life. Her school has decided that it can no longer support the orchestra. Yumi and her friends in the orchestra decide to organize a concert to raise the money to fund it. But with no firm leadership or plans, the fundraiser is turning out to be a disorganized mess.

Now Yumi's mom has a new boyfriend and is also planning to move them out of the only home Yumi has ever known. She'll be further away from the beach, which means further from surfing.

She is also worried about her father, a punk-rock songwriter who has yet to sell a song, and who isn't exactly close to his father, Saul.

Over the next months, as she listens to the stories of Saul's life, Yumi learns that change is inevitable and that someday you may look back and realize that it was really the start of something wonderful.

I WANNA BE YOUR SHOEBOX is an endearing story that will warm your heart and bring tears to your eyes.

Crystal says

Yumi is a girl going through many changes and challenges. She just wants to stop & keep everything the same. That is not an option though so she takes her grandfather's advice and gets on with the business of living. The relationship she has with her grandfather is one of the reasons I enjoyed the book so much. He shares a lot of what he believes like, "I'd rather live with uncertainty than believe easy answers, only to have something to believe in." (p 151) Yumi is Japanese, Jewish and Cuban (with a little Guatemalan in there too) so race and culture come up, but the book is mostly about Yumi growing up and dealing with change. It has sad moments along with humorous ones and though romance is touched on, I appreciated that this book was not focused on that.

Jessica says

I am not a big fan of realistic fiction, but I enjoyed this one. When I finished though all I could think was, "this is the most well adjusted 13 year old around."

Heidi says

Thirteen-year-old Yumi fits the bill as a thoroughly modern, Southern California surfing, multi-cultural teen. She lives with her Cuban mom and sees her Japanese-Jewish dad often. He's a struggling punk-rock musician still waiting for his big break. Through talks with her grandfather, Yumi comes to some understanding about family issues. The music theme continues with a story line around Yumi's orchestra (she plays the clarinet). The story lines tie up nicely in this humorous, yet thoughtful quick read. The cover adorning the paperback version will be more appealing to teen readers than that of the hardcover version.

Oksana *Bookaholic* says

How many times have reviews started out with, "this is a really good book" or "really nice writing". Yeah, simple words, but they really get the meaning. Any young-adult would be lucky to read this.

Yumi's grandfather Saul has cancer, and is ready to leave this world. But not until he tells his story. Yumi takes on the responsibility of listening to Saul's story every week. But she still has her own problems. Her dad can't publish a song, her mom has a serious boyfriend, she and her mom are moving which means leaving behind the only friend Yumi's ever known. But the worst thing is that her school just shut down her orchestra. Clarinet-playing Yumi takes things into her own hands, determined to make orchestra matter again.

I loved this book because it was entertaining, heart-felt, and showed the path to How-to-Solve-Your-Problems.

E. Anderson says

Yumi's dad is half Japanese and half Jewish; her mom is Cuban. She is like no one she has ever met. But she fits in fine at school with her musician friends in the orchestra, which is all well and good, until the school announces that there is no longer a budget for the orchestra and it will be disbanded. To make things worse, Yumi's grandfather has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and her mother's boyfriend is cramping her style. Yumi, however, has a few plans. For one thing, if she is going to lose her grandfather, she is going to have her tell him his life story. Secondly, she and her friends will raise money to save the orchestra, but how? In this poignant story of challenge and change Yumi is an eccentric young heroine - a clarinetist who surfs with a punk rock dad and an author mom. Cristina Garcia constructs a powerful story around her, woven together with her grandfather's memories of growing up in Brooklyn. While sad, *I Wanna Be Your Shoebox* is hopeful, sweet, and truly memorable.

Heidi says

Yumi is not your average teen. Her parents have been divorced for a while; her mom, a Cuban author, her dad, the punk rocking son of a Japanese mom and New York Jewish dad. Yumi's on a search to find out who she is: is she her heritage? is she a clarinet player? a surfer? a conductor? a daughter? a granddaughter? a traveler? a runaway? a friend or GIRLfriend? Find out along side Yumi as she listens to the stories of her dying grandfather's life, as she supports her dad's punk rock career, learns to surf and tries to save her middle school's symphonic orchestra. *I Wanna Be Your Shoebox* is the title of Yumi's dad's new song, and perhaps Yumi herself as she stores the aspects of her life that make her who she is. May require a tissue at the end for the tender-hearted.

Kelleen says

Yumi Ruiz-Hirsch is the poster child for biracial children. Her mother is Cuban, while her father is half-Jewish and half-Japanese. Her parents are divorced and she lives with her mother, who has a new boyfriend.

Yumi worries about what any other 13-yr old girl would...school, boys, friends, orchestra, but has the added pressure of losing the apartment that she and her mom share. Add that to the fact that her school's orchestra is losing funding, her dad is depressed, and her grandfather is dying, Yumi does everything that she can to make her life more stable. Knowing that her grandfather, Saul, who is suffering from cancer, does not have much time left, she asks him to tell her his life story. Through his story, Yumi discovers that nothing in life is guaranteed and that sometimes you just have to roll with the challenges that life gives you. Yumi finds strength in her grandfather's story and in his death, and realizes that in order to be happy, you have to embrace life. I really enjoyed this book and loved how Yumi finds comfort in her grandfather's story and is able to find peace with how her life has changed. She is a very strong girl, and even with all the changes that are going on in her life, she is still able to come out on top. This is a very strong message for young girls, especially in middle school. I would recommend this book for grades 5 and up.

meg says

this book is kind of the perfect little-bit-of-everything read. thirteen-year-old yumi ruíz-hirsch is part cuban, part japanese, part jewish, part punk rock, part classical, part surfer, part vegetarian, part activist, and part historian. what could be a didactic nod to multiculturalism and liberal ideals is so much more. it is about family and music and moving and divorce and friendship and crushes and death and coming of age. occasionally the narrative gets a little overwhelmed with all the different aspects of the story, but then again life is kind of like that. yumi is a genuine and endearing character, and her grandfather's narrative at the close of each chapter adds an extra layer of richness to the story. i can think of so many kids to recommend this to.

random aside: i totally have the argyle sneaks on the paperback cover <3

Sandy says

Christina Garcia seems to have created the ultimate in non-didactic multicultural literature in the central character of her novel *I Wanna Be Your Shoebox*. Yumi Ruiz-Hirsch is part Cuban, part Japanese, and part Jewish. But she is also part musician, part surfer, and part historian. Yumi's eighth grade year seems to be more than a little filled up. Within the span of a few months, she has found out that her school will be cutting her beloved orchestra from its budget, her mother is remarrying, and her grandfather is dying. As Yumi listens to her grandfather Saul tell his life story, she also begins to learn to fight for the things she wants as she works with her classmates, father, and soon-to-be step-father to organize a punk rock orchestra fundraiser. She also quickly realizes that life doesn't always turn out the way you planned - sometimes you just have to make do the best you can and join in the dance.

Episodes from Yumi's year are beautifully described by the author, who was a National Book Award finalist in 1992 for her adult novel *Dreaming in Cuban*. Garcia's experience as an adult author shine though clearly in her first mid-grade novel, giving Yumi's narration a literary tone that will appeal to most, but could potentially turn away some less-experienced, less-patient readers. Overall, however, this novel's characters are beautifully drawn and Yumi's adventures show a delicious combination of youthful vigor and wise understanding. Saul's own narration of his life story, presented at the end of each chapter, is given a very distinct voice which makes his character stand out and adds a dynamic all its own as the reader learns along with Yumi about how his experiences have shaped the man he became.

