



The Reading Tub



The Caterpillar Story / La historia de la oruga

By Lily Guzman

An Interview with the Reading Tub® - Fall 2008

RT: Your new book, *The Caterpillar Story*, is about love and the choices we make for love. The story has a lot of allegory for a picture book. Who did you see as the audience when you were writing it?

LILY: When my older children were 9 and 11 years old, I had to choose between moving-on with my life, fully embracing a successful career in television production, or relinquishing my personal growth to give the failing marriage I was in another chance. I chose the later and wrote *The Caterpillar Story* to explain the predicament to my children. I also wanted to elucidate the intricacy of my feelings to the adults in my life.

RT: *The Caterpillar Story* is your first published book, but you have written other children's stories. What is your favorite of those stories? Do you think you'll ever publish it?

LILY: One of my stories is published in *The Moral of The Story*, a compilation of short tales by Jerry Newcombe. I currently have five stories in the wings, some of them written long ago. I wrote stories for my children, with the goal of teaching them specific life lessons. My favorite is "Simple Pebbles," a story that encourages you to look for the best in every person and appreciate what you may think are their unimportant qualities. I hope to publish all five stories soon as a series of life lessons for children.

RT: *The Caterpillar Story* is a bilingual book in rhyme, with text in both Spanish and English. Did you ever have to change the story in one language because something didn't work in the other language? Was it difficult or easy to capture the meaning in the same way, despite the differences language?

LILY: We purposely spoke Spanish at home to give our children a second language, and to encourage them to learn other languages as they grew. Seeing how advantageous it had been for them, I decided to write all my stories in both languages. Although it is often difficult to maintain the original message intact during translations, I have been able to preserve the feeling and essence of the stories by doing the translations myself.

RT: In doing the research for our interview, we found an [audio file](#) with you and your illustrator reading the book in Spanish and English. Was it hard to read your book out loud? Did you find yourself wanting to change or re-read parts to make sure your meaning was clear?

LILY: It has been such a pleasure to share *The Caterpillar Story* with an audience! Many mothers and grandmothers have approached me to say they relate to the caterpillar's sacrifice and the resulting promise of rainbows. One time, a mother told me she gave up her career in New York to follow her

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husband's career. She had not been able to discuss the issue with him and felt taken for granted; she asked me to sign a book for her husband making it an opportunity to start a conversation with him about her sacrifices and expectations.

RT: The Caterpillar Story is available as an eBook. In tracking your book's sales, have you found this to be a popular format choice? [LILY: Can you expand on this answer -- have you been surprised by how many downloads & CDs have sold? How are their sales figures compared to a traditional book.

LILY: The e-book has been popular among i-pod users. It is also available in CD. However, I have not been involved in the sales process as much as I should and since sales is not my forte, I have concentrated on the PR aspects such as book presentations and readings at libraries and schools. It is my understanding however, that print as well as audio downloads have been positively received and progressively rising, since the book came out in May.

RT: For most of your professional career, you've worked in television. Have you ever been involved with children's programming?

LILY: I have produced kid-relevant television programs, including panel discussion and interview format shows. For many years I hosted "Usted y Nosotros" (You and Us), a Spanish program for women in the Miami market.

RT: Although you've lived in the United States for more than 25 years, you were born and raised in the Dominican Republic. This is a country with a rich cultural tradition for storytelling. Do you envision transforming any of those stories into books some day?

LILY: Storytelling is one of the most popular pastimes in the Hispanic culture, where gatherings evolve into one type of tale or another – often comical in nature. Making a video from any of the stories I have written would be a dream-come-true.

RT: You have four grown children, all accomplished individuals. What were your favorite stories to read with your kids when they were growing up?

LILY: In our family story telling was a very special tradition; we used to gather after dinner and play a game of making-up stories. Usually I started the stories to establish the characters. Then I immediately passed it on to the oldest child to continue the narrative as she desired, and so on. You never knew where the next person was going to take the story. It was a great game! When it comes to books, our favorite bedtime stories were the classics, like Pinocchio, The Hamelin Flautist and Cinderella, as well as Oscar Wilde's stories, specially the Happy Prince.

RT: Do you have any suggestions for non-native speakers (English or Spanish) on ways to raise children so they are comfortable in a multi-lingual environment?

LILY: I am often asked about the language issue, since it has become a sensitive one in our nation. I can't overemphasize the importance of affording children ample exposure to other languages; not only because it is a tool for their own professional development, but also because it has been scientifically proven that it opens areas of the brain. Who wouldn't want to improve their child's learning and understanding capacity? We must protect the proper use of English, our language, and insist on providing our children the best possible English education in school. Still, exposure to other languages is a must in this global economy.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

LILY: With the Caterpillar Story I would like to reach caregivers, sharing with them a very intimate part of my soul. Over the years, I have witnessed a massive transition to a self-pleasing culture. We are disenfranchising our children from embracing unselfishness, sacrifices, and giving back to society without expectations of gains in return. I believe my story can facilitate the dialogue between caregivers and children, hoping to inspire readers to continue-on giving with the certainty of imminent rainbows.

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