

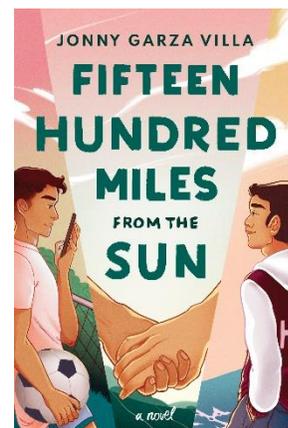


Pura Belpré Young Adult Author Honor Acceptance Speech



Jonny Garza Villa received a 2022 (Pura) Belpré Young Adult Author Honor for *Fifteen Hundred Miles from the Sun* (Skyscape). He delivered his acceptance remarks at the Pura Belpré Award Celebración held Sunday, June 26, 2022, during the ALA Annual Conference in Washington, DC.

First, allow me to say a thank you, un mil gracias to the ALSC, YALSA, and REFORMA, all those who had a say in this incredibly humbling decision, and all those who helped get me and Julián Luna’s story here. I am endlessly grateful and honored to be among the young adult representation for this year’s Pura Belpré Awards and Honors.



It would be a truth to say that I came into writing as a spur-of-the-moment decision. In late 2018, I opened up Microsoft Word not having a college degree or an MFA or the experience of a creative writing class or a history of writing fan-fiction or, really, any idea what I was doing. What carried me, what forced me to at least try, was knowing that there was—and still is—a need for stories of young queer Chicanos and Mexicans living in the United States. I knew the feeling of going through the first two decades of my life before seeing characters I could relate to in some way in books: of a girl named Esperanza and her time living in a house on Mango Street; of a boy named Tony growing up in rural New Mexico and the curandera who comes to live with his family; and of two boys named Aristotle and Dante who meet during one El Paso summer. I know how seeing our existences in literature, and those books being written by authors of our community, can be such a powerfully uplifting thing personally.

And that is why I wrote this book. That’s why I continue to tell stories. Not just because the idea of “what would happen if I made Selena’s ‘Dreaming of You’ into a coming out, coming-of-age story about a gay boy growing up in Corpus Christi, Texas?” would not leave my brain, but because they—and we—

deserve to exist. Because young Latines—especially the queer ones, navigating their adolescences between identities and cultures and, hopefully, finding the beauty of that intersectionality—deserve stories where they can be the main character; stories that decenter whiteness; stories that don't even invite whiteness; stories about brown kids that can have grief and trauma but so much more love and joy; stories where queer and trans BIPOC characters can be it all: the lead, the love interest, the best friend, and the comedic relief.

I extend this thought to even *Fifteen Hundred Miles from the Sun's* dedication, the first half of which reads “to all the queer brown boys still waiting for their chance to bloom.” This book is for them and now, this Honor too, is equally for them. For all of us queer Chicanas, Mexicans, Latines. For those who, like me, struggled for so much of my life navigating those aforementioned identities and cultures; who spent years placating family members, peers, and our community by toning ourselves down, refusing to embrace those beautiful parts of ourselves for the sake of our own safety. It is also for those whose lives weren't like that and have always been able to be both loudly and proudly Latine and queer, like the human embodiment of a strawberry horchata at a Pride parade. For all of us who've yearned to see someone like us as the main character of a story; someone who is brown like us illustrated on the cover of a book; who shares our struggles and hopes and dreams.

To all of you who have supported and encouraged me, I am blessed and forever thankful. To all of you who've invited Jules Luna and Mat and all his friends into your heart, I am honored to have been able to share this story with you. And, to my community—to LGBTQIA+ Tejanas, Chicanas, and Mexicans living in the U.S.—I hope I've done you proud, I hope to continue doing you proud, and always remember you are beautiful and powerful and loved and enough. This is for you. And, like the final sentence of my book reads, I'm just getting started.

Thank you.

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