



MAGICAL

REALISM

FOR

NON-BELIEVERS

A MEMOIR OF
FINDING FAMILY

ANIKA FAJARDO

A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *MAGICAL REALISM FOR NON-BELIEVERS: A Memoir of Finding Family*
by Anika Fajardo

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“Incredibly well written and compelling, Anika Fajardo’s *Magical Realism for Non-Believers* is a remarkable memoir about the search for a father, a culture, a self. I felt like I was reading about my own life and the price I paid for assimilation and acculturation. I simply couldn’t put it down.”

—**PABLO MEDINA**, author of *The Island Kingdom* and *Cubop City Blues*

“Bicultural experience is a dispassionate term for life lived across borders, identities, and even family trees. As Anika Fajardo makes clear in this searching and lyrical memoir, there is nothing dispassionate about flying back to one’s birthland, walking its soil again, or breaking bread with family who have become as good as strangers. Fajardo seeks to reconnect these missing and scattered pieces, and it is a privilege to journey beside her.”

—**LILA QUINTERO WEAVER**, author of *Darkroom: A Memoir in Black and White*

“A rare read, you know the kind: you don’t want it to end but you can’t put it down. Bewitching and beautiful, bound to move anyone who was ever a parent or a child, and just as compelling (and magical) the second time around.”

—**DINAH LENNEY**, author of *The Object Parade*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANIKA FAJARDO was born in Colombia and raised in Minnesota. Her writing has been published in the anthologies *Brief Encounters: A Collection of Contemporary Nonfiction* and *Sky Blue Water: Great Stories for Young Readers* (Minnesota, 2016). She has earned awards from the Jerome Foundation, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Loft Literary Center. The manuscript for *Magical Realism for Non-Believers* was a finalist for the Bakeless Literary Prize in Creative Nonfiction. She lives in Minneapolis.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

He loved Colombia too much to leave it. The explanation from her Minnesotan mother was enough to satisfy a child's curiosity about her missing father. But at twenty-one, Anika Fajardo wanted more. She wanted to know her father better and to know what kind of country could have such a hold on him. And so, in 1995, Fajardo boarded a plane and flew to Colombia to discover a birthplace that was foreign to her and a father who was a stranger. There she learns that sometimes, no matter how many pieces you find, fitting together a family history isn't easy.

With her tentative entry into her father's world, Fajardo steps on a path that will take her in surprising directions, toward unsuspected secrets about her family and herself. Set against the changing backdrops of Colombia and the American Midwest, her journey carries her back to the 1970s and the beginnings of her parents' broken marriage, and forward to the present day, where the magic and reality of love and heartache—and her own experience as a parent—await her. The way is strewn with obstacles, physical and metaphysical—from the perils encountered on a mountain road in Colombia to the death of a loved one to the birth of her own child—but the toughest to negotiate are the shifting place of memory and truth while coming to understand her place in her family and in the world.

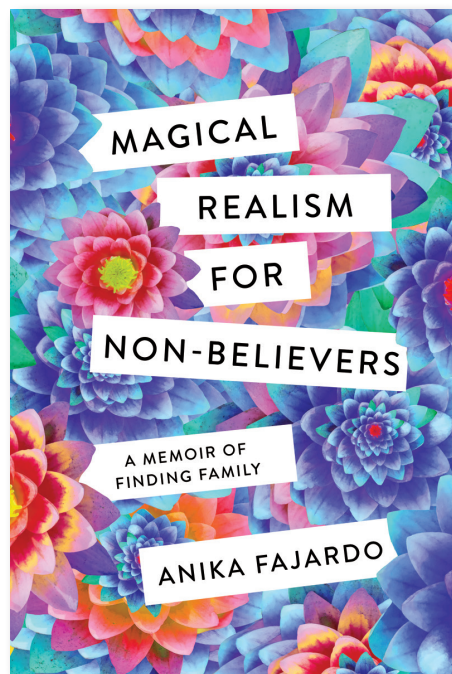
Vivid and heartfelt in the telling, Fajardo's story is powerfully compelling in its bridging of time and place and in its moving depiction of self-transformation. Family, she comes to find, is where you find it and what you make of it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a child in the '80s, Anika is told, "Families have a mom and a dad." How does that impact her?
2. Early in the memoir, the author imagines an alternate version of her life. At what other points in the book do you think she could have explored the same what-could-have-beens? What alternate versions of your own life can you imagine?
3. The author writes, "We can take over other people's memories, shape them with repeated recitations, mold them until they suit our needs." How does that affect whether or not you believe the stories she tells in the book? Do you have any memories you're not sure are your own?
4. The author says she couldn't be angry with her mother but she could be angry with her father. Why does she reach that conclusion? Do you agree?
5. When the author tells the story of seeing fairies during her childhood, she says, "I didn't feel the need to believe it in order for it to be true." In modern society, and especially politics, belief and truth are often intertwined. Do you have to believe something in order for it to be true? Conversely, can something be true simply because you believe it?
6. What do you think the author means by "not quite foreign, not quite domestic"?
7. *Magical Realism for Non-Believers* is a memoir, not a novel, so why does the author choose to highlight the fiction of Gabriel García Márquez, the Colombian writer and Nobel laureate?
8. Anika's doctor tells her that the numbness on the scar from her C-section is a result of the severed nerves during surgery, and that, although it can take years, they will eventually grow back. What other examples of numbness are there in the book?
9. Do you think the author really saw a ghost in the Iglesia de Santo Domingo that January night?
10. Renzo tells his daughter that he wants her to see how beautiful Colombia is. Does she? How did this book affect your understanding of Colombia?

11. The search for understanding of what family means plays a central role in the book. What does family mean to you? Do you have to be related to someone in order for them to be family? If someone is a blood relative, does that automatically make them family?

12. Does *Magical Realism for Non-Believers* have a happy ending? Why or why not?



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