

90 Miles To Havana

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Julian is a young boy growing up at the start of the revolution in Cuba. He lives with his mother, father, and two older brothers. His father is an architect and has built a nice life for his family. When the current president packs his bags and leaves the country, new rulers take over. There are new rules and people are trying to get out of the country and move to America. Many families are sending their children first with the hope they will come later. Julian's family watch as friends and neighbors begin to leave but they decide to stay because Julian's father thinks things will get better. When Julian's mom finds out the kids can be taken from them, she makes arrangements for the children to leave the country. There's a camp in Florida that is taking in children until their parents can come to the states. With fake passports in hand, the children fly to Florida and are taken to the camp, where they reunite with some of the friends they had back in Cuba. Julian finds out that the camp is just temporary until the camp director can find an orphanage or foster home willing to take them in. This comes as unexpected news because he thought he would stay with his brother.

Caballo is a bully in the camp and the director has given him the job of keeping order in the camp. After multiple problems between Julian's brother and Caballo, his brothers are sent to an orphanage in Denver leaving Julian alone at the camp. He gets comfort from having his friends Angelita and Pepe at the camp who assures him he's not alone. Angelita and Pepe have built a tunnel from the camp to a tomato field at the other side of the swamp where they sneak off to work. They take Julian with them and he is introduced to Tomas, who works in the fields. Tomas tells Julian about a boat he's been working on and invites him out anytime. Caballo continues to give Julian problems so Julian and his friends get fed up and decide to play tricks on Caballo to get back at him, eventually Julian decides he has to leave because things are getting worse with Julian.

Angelita helps Julian get to Tomas. Tomas allows him to stay. Tomas shows him different ways to make money and they continue to work on the boat. Julian soon finds out that Tomas has a big but dangerous plan in mind and Julian wants to help. Tomas allows Julian to help and their plan is a success. Once back, Julian is reunited with his mother and brothers in Connecticut where his uncle has agreed to sponsor them and they will start their new life but he finds out his father wasn't allowed to leave. The family hopes they can get him out of Cuba soon.

I liked reading how Julian was able to overcome his fears. I also enjoyed reading about the friendships he made that he held close to him. All the characters were interesting in their own right. This is an upbeat story that portrays courage. I would recommend it for ages 11-14. I think it would be a great book to check out on a trip to the library.

Recommended Titles

Amal Unbound, by Aisha Saeed

Sylvia & Aki, by Winifred Conkling

Return To Sender, by Julia Alvarez