

Ana Menendez

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About this Person

Born: April 08, 1970 in Los Angeles, California, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

Other Names: Menendez, Ana Maria

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PERSONAL INFORMATION

Born April 8, 1970, in Los Angeles, CA; daughter of Saul R. and Maria M. Menéndez; married Dexter Filkins (a journalist; divorced).

Education: Florida International University, B.A., 1992; New York University, M.F.A., 2001. **Addresses:** Agent: Joy Harris Literary Agency, Inc., 156 Fifth Ave., Ste. 617, New York, NY 10010. **E-mail:** anamariamenendez@hotmail.com.

CAREER

Miami Herald, Miami, FL, journalist, beginning 1991, columnist, 2005--; *Orange County Register*, Santa Ana, CA, journalist; freelance writer. Fulbright scholar at American University in Cairo, Egypt, 2008.

AWARDS

New York Times fellow at New York University; Pushcart Prize, for *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*.

WORKS

WRITINGS:

- *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd* (stories), Grove Press (New York, NY), 2001.
- *Loving Che* (novel), Atlantic Monthly Press (New York, NY), 2003.
- *The Last War* (novel), HarperCollins (New York, NY), 2009.

Contributor to magazines, including *Vogue*, *Bomb*, *Gourmet*, and *Poets & Writers*.

SIDELIGHTS

Ana Menéndez is the daughter of Cuban exiles who fled to Los Angeles in 1964 and later moved to Florida, at first to Tampa and then Miami. During the 1990s, she worked as a journalist for six years, first at the *Miami Herald* and then the *Orange County Register* in Southern California. She returned to the *Miami Herald* in 2005 as a columnist, a position she held until 2008 when she received a Fulbright grant to be an instructor at the American University in Cairo.

In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd is a collection of eleven short stories. The stories are all about Cuban immigrants who fled to the United States and tried to create new lives and adjust to mainstream American culture. The title story, which was also included in the 2001 Pushcart Prize anthology, is about four elderly men who regularly play dominoes in a park, joking and talking about the past while tourists look on. In the United States the men are friends, but it is doubtful that they would have been friends in Cuba. Reviewing the book for *Booklist*, Michael Spinella wrote, "Menéndez paints a rich portrait of Florida's famed Cuban exile community." In the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* Anne Foltz commented, "Menéndez's work highlights what it means to have a shared heritage and history and--for far too many--to have endured them for so long in the solitude of silence and memory."

In her first novel, *Loving Che*, Menéndez "connects the understandable loss of exile with a much more profound 'trauma of separation,'" explained Timothy Peters, writing in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "Raised in Miami by her grandfather, the unnamed narrator longs to know the truth of her parents, but the grandfather only supplies 'the understanding that my father had been in prison, and had died there, and that in her grief my mother had sent me away.' Such a cursory explanation fails to answer the questions that haunt this detached young woman, and she begins to search for her mother or, at least, for a glimpse of her mother's experience." However, "when she draws close to giving up her search, a package of papers and photographs is anonymously sent to her," wrote Carol Memmott in *USA Today*. "Among the papers are letters that may be from her mother. They introduce the protagonist to a fantastical idea: Her mother ... had a torrid love affair with Guevara, and she is their love child."

"The writing is consistently beautiful," wrote Mary Margaret Benson in her *Library Journal* review. "Though there are wobbles and occasional toneless spots throughout," stated a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor, "both parts of the book ... do considerably more rather than less to evoke the flavor and feeling of Havana." "Oddly, it's the love affair that is the least successful element of the story," opined *Seattle Times* reviewer Richard Wallace. "Too much poetic eroticism can bore even the most romantic of readers. Yet this indulgence doesn't really hurt this splendid novel. Menéndez shows us how recapturing the past is a brave and somewhat hopeless enterprise."

In *The Last War*, Menéndez launches the action with a letter from an anonymous writer telling the protagonist Margarita Anastasia Morales (known as "Flash") that her husband, Brando, has cheated on her. "The narrator, Flash, is a photojournalist. She and her husband are a team, veterans of joint overseas assignments," wrote *New York Times Book Review* contributor Gaiutra Bahadur. "The letter's appearance at their home in Istanbul, where she waits before joining Brando in Baghdad, causes her to wander the city in a mawkish fog of doubt, interrogating the past." She soon becomes aware that she is being followed by a nameless woman in a burka. "Returning from one of her aimless rambles one evening, Flash is startled to see the woman standing in her living room," wrote Zofia Smardz in the *Washington Post Book World*. "She is an old acquaintance named Alexandra Truso, who is also, as it happens, an old nemesis, one of those women who instantly attract men while making women feel invisible." Torn between the disintegrating relationship with her husband and the need to recreate one with Alexandra Truso, as well as the continuing effects of covering so many wars, leads Flash to confront her own sense of rootlessness.

Critics celebrated Menéndez's accomplishments in *The Last War*. Several noted that Menéndez had said the story had roots in her own life: like Flash, Menéndez received an anonymous letter warning her that her journalist-husband was being unfaithful. The plot of *The Last War*, stated a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, "slips by quickly, but leaves behind the resonant idea that it's human nature to 'fear return.'" The author, wrote Deborah Donovan in *Booklist*, "offers astute and perceptive commentary on both the hidden and obvious effects of war and its aftermath." "Menéndez is a fantastic writer; with the most pristine prose, she can relate the most obscene or disturbing emotions," declared Jana Siciliano in a review for *Book Reporter*. "Her spare prose is a truth serum that makes her characters as forthcoming as they could be."

FURTHER READINGS

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PERIODICALS

Booklist, April 15, 2001, Michael Spinella, review of *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*, p. 1536; November 15, 2003, Michael Spinella, review of *Loving Che*, p. 576; May 1, 2009, Deborah Donovan, review of *The Last War*, p. 64.

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Kirkus Reviews, October 1, 2003, review of *Loving Che*, p. 1195.

Knight-Ridder/Tribune News Service, August 29, 2001, Jay Goldin, review of *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*, p. 2707.

Library Journal, April 15, 2001, Mary Margaret Benson, review of *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*, p. 135; January 1, 2004, Mary Margaret Benson, review of *Loving Che*, p. 159.

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Publishers Weekly, May 7, 2001, review of *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*, p. 221; October 27, 2003, review of *Loving Che*, p. 42; April 6, 2009, review of *The Last War*, p. 30; April 20, 2009, "PW Talks with Ana Menéndez," p. 27.

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Seattle Times, February 13, 2004, Richard Wallace, "*Loving Che*: Love, Revolution, Exile, and Longing."

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Vanity Fair, February, 2004, Henry Alford, "Revolutionary Lore," p. 58.

Washington Post Book World, September 12, 2009, Zofia Smardz, "Love Is a Battlefield."

ONLINE

Ana Menéndez Home Page, <http://www.anamenendezonline.com> (August 24, 2010).

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Huffington Post, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/> (August 24, 2010), author profile.

Lip Magazine, <http://www.lipmagazine.org/> (August 24, 2010), Suzanne Cody, review of *In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd*.

New York State Writers Institute, <http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/> (August 24, 2010), author profile.*

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