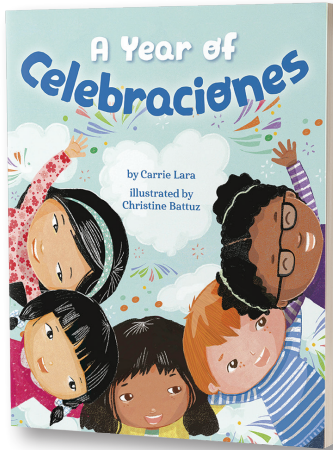




## *A Year of Celebraciones:* Interview with the author



Magination Press interviewed author Carrie Lara about creating her third book, *A Year of Celebraciones*, about a little girl with a bi-cultural family.

You can purchase the book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

### **Magination Press: What inspired you to write *A Year of Celebraciones*?**

**Carrie Lara:** So many things! First, of course the story of the little girl that had started with *Marvelous*, *Maravilloso* and continued in *The Heart of Mi Familia*. The original inspiration for her story was my daughter, and her experience as a bi-cultural child growing up in her family and the greater community. Following the general phases of cultural identity development, the idea was to have the little girl now move to learning about herself through learning about others.

The tricky part was how to depict that in a story. I had the idea of a class project, to focus on the kids bringing in their own cultural traditions to help facilitate that experience for the story, but I was stuck on what would be the main topic to carry it through. The idea of a holiday seemed appropriate, but many holidays are religious and are not celebrated across many cultures. I wanted something that would be more inclusive of many, if not all cultures if I could.

One day while hiking with a dear friend of mine, she shared with me her family plans that weekend for Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year's holiday. And it just hit me! Here we are in September, and she was celebrating her New Year. Of course so many cultures celebrate a New Year at different times of the year, with different traditions, some religious and some not. It grew from there.

**MP: This is the third book about this little girl and her developing social and cultural identity. Why did you decide to focus on a variety of cultural experiences instead of continuing to explore her family's more deeply?**

**CL:** My question for my original book was about her experience as a bicultural child, personally and in her environment, and how did that work in developing her own cultural identity? So starting in the first book we are following her

through the levels of cultural identity development. Initially, as a toddler she is learning identification of the world, labeling colors and categories, but without the societal context yet.

*The Heart of Mi Familia* then has the girl a little bit older, where she is now able to contextualize what makes up culture, such as the sights, music, language, smells, foods, all of it. Even though when I had written the first book and it became a realized dream, I did not know that it would continue into the second and now this third book. After completing *Mi Familia*, we discussed the third book as a natural progression in following the cultural identity journey. We naturally learn more about our own identity, through how we relate to others within our environment.

In *A Year of Celebraciones* we get to see our girl now a little bit older, learning about herself through learning about her friends' cultural traditions. Initially she is so excited to share all about herself and her own traditions, but as each child presents their traditions and symbols she realizes how interesting and fun they are too. She finds similarities and differences throughout. And in the end, comes to the conclusion there is room for everyone on the beautiful mural that they have created together.

**MP: How did you select which New Year's celebrations to include?**

**CL:** This was so hard! I had researched many different cultures and learned so much, which was really the fun part of this project. The original manuscript I had well over 10 cultures included, and I tried to include as much as I could about each one. But being a picture book, we had to scrap a lot of the written words so that we could make it fit. It was so hard to cut any of it. In the end, I had to acknowledge that I couldn't include everybody and everything. In the Note to Readers, I encourage readers to take the opportunity to continue doing their own research, look up cultures they are interested in, or maybe their own cultural traditions, and learn more. There is so much to learn!

**MP: What can children and families gain by learning about how different cultures celebrate a common holiday?**

**CL:** Not only is there the opportunity to learn about another culture and the interesting traditions that are included in a common holiday, there is the opportunity to learn more about the connections that you might have in the commonality of traditions or symbols. Learning about others helps children to develop empathy and understanding. We talk about windows and mirrors in children's literature a lot. We want to create mirrors so that children can see themselves in books, and windows which allows children to see and learn about others to derive that understanding of others' experience. This is very important in a child's development. Utilizing something like a holiday is a really good way to help facilitate this opportunity.

**MP: Did you learn anything surprising when researching New Year's celebrations?**

**CL:** Lots of things actually. I really enjoyed learning about the symbolism that is included in many of the traditions across the world. Lots of rituals and ceremonies included a type of cleansing, a washing away of the old and starting fresh. Whether it was through fire, with water, or music/story and dance, this was symbolized over and over. I found this really cool. I really wish I could have included them all!

**MP: Did you work with the illustrator, Christine Battuz, or did she create the illustrations using just your text as her guide?**

**CL:** After the story is pretty much finalized it is sent to Christine who works from the text to create her beautiful illustrations. We do have some back and forth with the sketches after that point, which has been nice with all of my books I've worked on with her. I have some input, and that has really made for such a feeling of collaboration on all three books. But the artistic genius is her, she is amazing!

**MP: What did you think when you saw the illustrations? Were they how you'd envisioned the story or were they surprising?**

**CL:** Yes, absolutely! I think the only difference I had envisioned was maybe the mural? I had originally imagined the children pinning their symbols on the big mural, somehow hanging them up there on the wall, but logistically this would have probably been very difficult for the teacher in the real classroom. I think that is why she had them draw their symbols to be put on the mural. That made sense! I am always amazed with how the stories come alive with the illustrations. The pictures have been such a big part of my stories for this little girl, color, imagery, all of it!

**MP: Do you have special New Year's traditions that your family observes? If you do, what are they and where did they come from?**

**CL:** Well actually, the little girl in the story symbolically represents my children, and we do have a bicultural household. As the little girl shares, her father is from Nicaragua which is where my husband is from. We do the ano viejo tradition as described in the story. The difference is that in Nicaragua the ano viejo is large, made of old clothes stuffed with hay, firecrackers and other flammable items. The head is usually an old beat up ball or something with a drawn face on it. We can't exactly light a giant scarecrow here in Sonoma County, so we do the stuffed sock as a miniaturized version. We also eat grapes like they do in Nicaragua, eat other traditional foods, dance to Latin music and celebrate late into the night. And then for my side of the family, we watch the ball drop and fireworks on the TV and in the morning we watch the Rose Parade while eating egg casserole and cinnamon rolls: a combination of both cultures.

**MP: Do you have more books planned for this series?**

**CL:** At this time, there are no more planned books for this little girl. It has been fun to watch her grow through her journey of cultural identity development. And if you asked me when the first one was published if there were going to be more books, I would have said no. Interesting how life unfolds! I guess I can't say never, she may pop up again. And I hope that people enjoy them either independently or as the unintentional series they have become.

**MP: What is your favorite holiday and how do you celebrate it?**

**CL:** This is a hard question, I love holidays and celebrations. I would probably say Christmas is my favorite personally. We have a lot of traditions that we do from both cultures within our home and I love how we have woven together our own unique celebrations. We decorate the first weekend of December, and I love the music, sights, sounds and tastes of the holiday in general.

In Nicaragua there are fireworks and crackers, dancing with el toro and lots of parades, parties and celebrations throughout the week leading up to Christmas Eve. Then on December 24th there is the main party, and everyone sleeps and catches up on rest on December 25th.

So we typically celebrate our “Nicaragua” Christmas on Christmas Eve and our “United States” Christmas on Christmas Day. We have our larger family over on December 24th. We eat traditional Nicaraguense food, Bajo or Nacatamales. We celebrate with music and dancing, and calls with family in Nicaragua. And we open one family present (usually new pjs for all and a game or new movie). On Christmas Day, we open stockings first, and then presents starting with those from Santa. We take turns to watch each other opening. Grandma and Grandpa typically come over to join in the fun. Then we have breakfast with some type of special treat and enjoy the day together, ending with family dinner with extended relatives (usually at Grandma’s and Grandpa’s).

### **This Article’s Author**

Carrie Lara, PsyD, is a licensed clinical psychologist who has worked with a range of clients, from children and families to adults with severe mental illness. She is an award-winning children’s book author whose books include the award-winning *Marvelous Maravilloso*, *The Heart of Mi Familia*, and *Out of the Fires*.

She lives in Sonoma County, CA with her family. [Visit her website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).