

## CHAPTER ONE

### Faces of Cuba

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I was in Cuba for a workshop most of the past month. One day I was talking with a Cuban photographer friend and the subject of the al Qaeda prisoners at Guantanamo came up. Nelson said to me, "You know there is an observation tower there?"

I answered, "You mean for Cubans to watch?"

He said, "Yes, but now it is very popular to go there and watch. The government has put several telescopes there and for \$2 US you

can look and see the prisoners! It has become popular with the tourists."

This, whether factual or not, is just another of the many surreal aspects of the Cuba-United States relationship. If it is not factual, it is still a good metaphor for this special relationship. A tiny little island, with a bankrupt economy, an aging dictator with less and less influence in his own government, an indigenous population still held incommunicado by its leaders, is able to squeeze a few more dollars out of the fanaticism and fear of the most powerful country on the planet. I thought this is just one more bizarre step in the journey that has now survived armed invasion by a super power, the terms of ten US presidents, multiple assassination plots by the CIA and Mafia, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the abject failure of communism world wide. In spite of the failures of the Cuban government and the "Bearded One", more than one million people turned out for a rally to support the new petition to change the constitution. I was there in the midst of the parade and, "I got the pictures!"

A new law was needed declaring Cuba a socialist society and government forever. Having seen the petition booths both in Havana and in the countryside, I was surprised to learn that 8.7 of 8.8 million registered voters had signed. I never saw anyone in the booths, but I did not watch them all the time. I took one picture of a booth with a couple of children and a mother in it. They were giving candy to the kids. Certainly the reported vote was an overwhelming rejection of the dissidents who had recently presented their petition with enough names to force an election under the old constitution. Any respectable communist knows that a one party system works better for the system than a two party system. In fact, even any loyal Democrat or

Republican in the US acts as if they believe the same thing about their party. In a country where computer printers are against the law and the distribution of radios is considered an act of international terrorism, it is hard to accept any data as real and fact based information.

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### Getting There

My first encounter with Cuba was in the late 1950s as I watched news reports of Fidel Castro and his men camping in the mountains and planning a revolution. In 1962 I lived in an apartment directly across from the railroad tracks in Waldo, Florida. I remember sitting in my living room listening to the rumble as trains carrying all sorts of military hardware rolled southward. Later in the winter I visited Key West and saw the rocket launchers set up on the beach and the concertina wire strung in the sand dunes. It was definitely surreal to rub on tanning lotion, spread your towel and then sunbathe within spitting distance of tanks and the missile launchers. I attended both undergraduate and graduate school at the University of Florida. It seemed that everywhere I went, worked, or looked someone who had fled Cuba was on the scene. I had Cuban fraternity brothers, Cuban classmates, and Cuban faculty. After I finished med school, life got more complicated and I never thought much more about Cuba or its problems.

Twenty years later I learned that my second wife had a keen interest in Cuba. Her aunt had lived in both Tampa and Miami and her uncle had been a regular traveler to Cuba. In fact he went back and forth almost every other week in the fifties, carrying a leather case that contained the tools of his trade as "elevator repairman."

Interestingly he typically wore a tropical weave suit, Panama hat, and wing tipped white buckskin shoes to do this work. Frequently both aunt and uncle went and returned with exotic postcards, matchbook covers, and swizzle sticks from exciting sounding hotels. These souvenirs provoked the interests and imagination of a young girl and became the seeds of my wife's strong interest and desire to see Cuba before things changed too much. I consistently kidded her that her uncle was not an elevator man, but a numbers runner for the Mafia. The night we checked into the Ambos Mundos Hotel in Havana, she victoriously pointed out the brass plate in the beautiful old steel cage elevator that was emblazoned with "Otis Elevator Company."

Although I knew that many US citizens went illegally back and forth and that the likelihood of getting caught or fined was remote, I wanted to go legally within the system, just one less thing to worry about. I considered several different options and decided on attending one of the Cuba sessions of the Maine Photographic Workshops winter session in Havana. I took a workshop conducted by Lazaro Miranda, who is an accomplished Cuban photographer, now residing in the Miami area. I figured if I am going to Cuba; why not attend the classes of a Cuban photographer?

Flying to Cuba has been both an adventure and a Cuban culture lesson. My first trip was through Cancun. We flew AeroCaribe from Cancun to Havana. The plane was 5 hours late (actually it took 5 hours to get another plane from Mexico City that was fit to fly.) We waited in the departure lounge with a group of about 25 to 30 men who ranged in age from about 25-60 years old. They were from all over the US, but they knew one another. It seemed like a fraternity or business club reunion more than anything else. Turns out that they all knew one

another having met in Cuba, and about every 6 weeks they returned to the beach resort Varadero for discos, mojitos, and señoritas. I would learn later that this was the tip of the iceberg that was the sex tourist craze that was both an economic boom and social blemish for the new Cuban economy. A year and a half later, I again went through Cancun on my second visit. This time the plane trip was smoother, and much quieter. We had a large contingent from Witness for Peace. Again they had a wide range of ages, were very personable and seemed to have a good time, but it was a quieter more sober crowd. Their mission was cultural exchange, learning Spanish, and living with poor Cuban families throughout the country.

The other trips have had different routes. Once I was persuaded to fly Cubana, the Cuban national airline. Its connection was in Nassau, Bahama. There was total chaos at the check-in counter. Most of the passengers were Cuban and they were completely at ease with the lines and the hassle. They either shrugged or attached cash to their ticket. The latter move seemed most effective in getting people through quickly. There was a line to get your visa stamped, the next line checked your baggage and charged for any overweight bags, the third line checked for the stamp, receipt for baggage, and then gave out boarding passes. No seat assignment just a sprint to the plane boarding pass. I got the last seat in the plane, which was fortuitous as it turned out. The 40-year-old YAK-42, (I wonder who makes replacement parts), passenger jet showed its wear, but it did take off. An hour later as we descended into Jose Marti Airport just outside Havana, our group had its first big adventure. When these planes decompress the cabin, outside tropical moisture laden air rushes in through the cooling system. The aisle in the plane fills with water vapor that looks just like giant flumes of smoke. The Cuban

passengers are very used to this; us tourists were needless to say less certain. I was hopeful, if not certain, enough to get a good picture of it.

Entering the terminal for the first time you are struck by its Spartan but functional nature. It is not glitzy like most US terminals, but it's not a shed like many Caribbean terminals. There are agents with cute little cocker spaniels on leashes. They are cute little pets and then you realize that all are nodding off, they are stoned drug dogs who will run over and sniff your cuffs and bags for illegal substances. One then passes through security coming in, a means of controlling the entry of unlawful weapons. All bags are x-rayed coming in, cartons and some bags are sent to customs to be opened and inspected. This process all seems to have become simpler over the last three years. Maybe even a little more relaxed. It is easy to catch a cab outside the arrivals terminal. Ours promptly got stopped by a speed trap, and the driver got his third ticket in a few months, hence he lost driving privileges and a very highly sought after job--taxi driver being very desirable. Most are ex-dentists, doctors, professors, or teachers. Tips are generally very good.

It is very dark compared to most airport areas. It has gotten darker. This last trip the black outs were back. This no doubt a result of the government's inability to pay its oil bills in Venezuela leading to suspension of shipments. No oil, no power; hey, keep them in the dark! Our host in Trinidad had large battery powered lanterns that he brought out during the evening blackouts there.

First Impressions

I was struck by the openness and friendliness of the people. My goal was to accomplish some photography. I had no problem finding people who would agree to have their photograph made. The most difficult thing was to keep them from posing stiffly or artificially. I met Roberto, a licensed interpreter and guide, whose services proved extremely valuable. He was able to listen to what I wanted to photograph and suggest several places where we might accomplish my goals. Very quickly he made my goals into our goals. This was far better than I could have accomplished simply armed with map and guidebook. He was able to joke with people, put them at ease, and enable much more candid photography than stiff, posed images. We even went to several of his friends' homes and photographed them in their own personal environment. These were usually turned into social occasions with water, juice, and cookies. Although the Cuban people have very little, what they do have is shared and people are extremely hospitable.

Roberto is well educated, literate, and very much computer literate. He is ambitious and entrepreneurial, traits not admired by official Cuba. This conflict in ambitions has come to represent a real problem for Cuban society and threatens the official goal of maintaining socialism forever. Many well-educated professionals prefer to work in the tourist industry where incomes are greatly supplemented by tips, than at their other professions. Dentists drive cabs, engineers wait tables, nurses and school teachers hang out in tourist bars and hotels hoping to hook up with a visitor desiring a companion for the night or several days.

Roberto is a practitioner of Santeria, the Afro-Cuban pantheistic religion. He became a much stronger believer after his wife, who was

quite ill with hepatitis, was helped by the intercession of a Santeria priest. We visited Roberto's home and he explained to us each of the shrines in his house, a truly fascinating afternoon. This religious belief system is wide spread through out the country. Many who are Roman Catholic or Protestant are also believers or practitioners of Santeria. On my last trip I was privileged to attend a ceremony of sacrifice, which was truly fascinating. The drumbeat provided a rhythmic background for the dance. The heat and sun on the beach led to consumption of both water and rum. Two chickens were sacrificed. Since this offering was to Yemaya, god of the sea, it was held where a river joins the ocean. Two dancers became entranced or possessed. One of these was in the surf, and to an old lifeguard sure looked like a drowning victim in the making; she was rescued by several of us.

The people whom we met were all extremely friendly. They made it clear, "We like Americans! It is our governments that don't get along." They seem healthy and clean in spite of extreme shortages of things like soap, personal toiletries and the like. Most smoke, the government sells cigarettes at about 50 cents per pack. US cigarettes Marlboro, Winston, Lucky Strike, etc., are all readily available at prices cheaper than US prices. They come from Mexico and are not taxed near so heavily. There are many hustlers in the tourist areas. The young men would approach and ask if I wanted to buy cigars. I would answer, "No, gracias."

The immediate response was, "Why you don't want? They are very good, my brother works in the factory."

I would tap my chest and answer, "*Non fumar*, don't smoke, I have heart trouble."



Their demeanor would immediately change to one of concern and sympathy and they would express their concern and wish me luck. One year later many of the hustlers, *jineteros*, had become much more aggressive and much more business like. Tourism is stripping away the youthful naiveté and innocence. The more typical cynicism seen in other parts of the world is rapidly replacing it. According to a friend, there is much more stealing, purse snatching, and that sort of thing. Violence is still less prevalent than in most parts of the US. A group of the students went on our private bus to the baseball game. They were harassed by a group of young men, late teens they looked to be, several necklaces were ripped from the students' necks by hooligans reaching through the open windows. They engaged the students in conversation, the students naively leaned out through the window, and poof, the thief was gone with the jewelry.

Tourism has been declining, especially this year, and as that happens the economy worsens--both in terms of the national income and in terms of personal per capita income, there is just less money in the street and in local businesses. It is easy to see this as one walks about. Many stalled restoration projects can be seen. People just look poorer, there is less food in the shops, and people have a more desperate look. They remember the "special period" of the early nineties and none want anything like that back. A photographer couple told me that in 1992 they ate nothing but cauliflower for six months--raw, boiled, baked, roasted, any way to try to change it. Young, smart, tall, slender and of mixed race and ethnic background these foreign born Cubans show the effects of their malnourishment. They both have gum disease, their teeth are not very healthy, and they have frequent infectious

diseases, mainly upper respiratory. They choose to eat less and spend a little on their photography. If they did not do this, "We would go insane!" they laugh.

It is not surprising that most of the people hope to become employed in the tourist sector. It is not unusual at all to find that your waiter is a graduate engineer, a dentist, or other professional. I met one young man selling his paintings at the open-air art market. He told me that he had studied architecture for 5 years and then worked for three years as an architect in a government office. This was a "pay back" obligation in return for his education. He discovered however that he could make more money selling small paintings to tourists for \$5 - \$10 each. He only had to sell 3 a month to better his architect's salary of about \$15 a month.

The people not involved in tourism for the most part live a grindingly impoverished life style. Although many are employed, Cuba is one of the few places in the world where one does not have to work to get the basics. Many people simply sit in doorways or windows staring at the street. When they do work, they carry the principle of Parkinson's Law to extremes. Work expands to occupy the time and number of people available to do it. Horribly underpaid, the people keep on smiling and living with the faith that the government will in some fashion provide. Watching a construction crew working on a renovation, six men of a crew of eight sat and listened to music; one mixed concrete; one set the concrete blocks to make a wall. In this way they are able to make the small pile of 20-25 concrete blocks last all week, thus all of them are employed. A friend who was a news photographer in Cuba in the early 1990s joked that in his hotel there

were two men in the elevator--one who asked which floor, another who pressed the button.

Although the government boasts of all of the recent foreign investment and partnerships, salaries are paid to the Cuban government, which then hires and pays the Cuban employees. By this means the salary received by the employee may be reduced by 75-90%! The tips are where the advantage is had. A cab driver may pick up 35-50 dollars a night in tips alone.

It will be a very difficult process to install capitalism and ambition in a country where as many as 50% don't work and are simply cared for by the government. It is and will remain a large welfare state. Not to say there aren't entrepreneurs there, but many are like an artist friend who likes life in Cuba. "I get enough to live on, I don't have to worry about going entirely without, so I am free to paint," he says. "No where else can I do that."

Having gone through the sex tourist rage in the early 1990s, more legitimate tourism is now being promoted. There were tour groups on the streets of Old Havana each day in spring of 2000. All decked out in hiking shoes, shorts and tee shirts with some motif emblazoned across the chest, these camera laden groups would have been equally in place in any number of tourist sites in the US. Our hotel elevator operator was an English and Italian professor, but he had given that up for the tourism. Now he works as elevator operator for a much larger income. He still gives private language lessons if anyone is interested. There is a potential conflict between those who enjoy the benefits of working in the tourism and those who don't. The latter are really the "have-nots" of Cuba. They still eke by on severely

rationed food, while the better food goes to the tourists. I met a young woman in her mid twenties. She had been educated and had worked as an English teacher. She wanted to change jobs to the tourist industry since she was only receiving twelve dollars a month. When she went for interviews, she was obliged to show her diploma. Once it was learned that she was a teacher, she was not permitted to change jobs. Teachers must teach. A year later she had quit her teaching job and was working as a freelance photographer. She had not had any film for several weeks, thus had been unable to work. I gave her six rolls of 35 mm film, she was thrilled with it.

In spite of the recovery from the privations of the early 1990s, the entire scene is one of profound but very simple irony. Forbade to do business with America, the common and usual currency is the American dollar. With a literacy rate that is the envy of the world, there are no newspapers of any serious purpose, no book stores, and at superficial survey, no libraries. The booksellers in Plaza Armas are all selling socialistic and communistic treatises by Marx, Lenin, Castro, and Che. There are no other history books, fiction, or for that matter technical textbooks. Visiting in March 2000, I asked a friend about the television. He answered. "Two stations, Elían y Elían!" He had been able to see the recent Grammy Awards by visiting a friend from one of the embassies. The friend had cable, brought over from the satellite dish at his embassy! There is a huge black market. Consumer electronics, computers and software, videotapes of American movies with subtitles or dubbed in Spanish, music CDs, medicines, and food are all briskly traded in the underground economy. This meets two needs--decent goods at reasonable prices and a steady source of income for those selling. *Videos particulars* can be rented at a rate of 3 for 25 cents US. Most are pirated, thus Cubans can see tapes of

brand new movies, dubbed in Spanish, while they are still playing in the US theaters!

There is a system that has evolved where everyone cooperates and gets by. An artist buys paints and art supplies from a man who has access to various pigments and chemicals. He then sold several paintings. He bought a computer on the black market, it came "from the back of a truck." He wanted a computer table. He went to a construction site and talked with the workers until he found a wood worker to build the computer desk. The wood worker gave him a list of materials and another worksite to visit. There he was able to buy the wood to be used to build the desk that would hold the computer that his paintings done with paint bought on the black market had funded. Seeing this micro economy in operation is fascinating. The Cubans have developed El Resolviendo--to make or find a way. By this method, they all get by, some prosper, and only a few ever are caught or punished by the government.

Everyday, everywhere there were smiling faces. Black, tan, white--all colors of people in spite of the official dictum that Cuba's race is mulatto. Chattering away in their brand of Spanish, some working hard, others simply hanging out. Fashion is not a major concern. The common attire for women appears to be spandex or Lycra, most often made up in the brightest stripes that can be found. Men typically wear baggy shirts and nondescript work pants or denim pants. It is not uncommon to see a tee shirt with some non-Latin motif--race cars, sports team, or resort logo blazing across Cuban chests. The streets of Old Havana are busy with people, not just tour groups, but locals out and about. Most shops and apartments open directly onto the streets, which are the play yards of the children, the front yards of the

homes, and the parking drives for those who have any sort of vehicle. They have none of the things we take for granted. There are no matches, many smoke, and they are thrilled to be given a simple Bic lighter. A small bottle of aspirin or acetaminophen will excite them, "Now, I can ease my head ache!" a worker in the hotel exclaimed. I developed a cold and searched for two days for cough syrup. I finally found a farmacia in the upscale shops of the Habana Libre Hotel, there I got the only bottle of codeine cough syrup, made by Smith Kline Beecham in France and imported by another division in Guatemala, an extraordinary journey for a bottle of cough syrup.

Before we went on our initial trip to Havana, my wife had searched on the Internet for Cuban artists. She had come across a website that showed images from several painters. One of whom she particularly liked. She got in touch with the manager of the site and obtained an address, telephone number, and tentative appointment with the artist. A few days after we arrived in Havana, she called and we set a time to visit. We took a taxi to the Miramar section that is one of the nicer sections in Havana. Most embassies, many international business offices, and the homes of their executive employees are there, having taken over the old Colonial homes that used to line Fifth Avenue, and now maintaining them. When we got to Juan's home, we noted the high steel link fence around his yard. There was a buzzer and he came and let us in, but carefully locked the gate behind us. He later told me, "When I moved in here, the fence was not high enough, I added to it."

We visited for two hours, had some orange juice, and briefly met Juan's father in law, the owner of the home. Juan showed us his work and we selected a painting for purchase. We also made plans to go to

a jazz club to hear Bobby, Margarita's brother in law who was alleged to be *muy famosa*. We got the address and agreed to show up around ten PM that Saturday night. It was a small intimate jazz cellar and the music was terrific. Bobby told us that he was coming to the US for a Latin Jazz Festival in Los Angeles later in the summer. Later I read a review stating that Bobby and his band were the hit of the festival. I have visited him again and he is very proud of the clippings from Los Angeles.

We decided to go to the Tropicana Night Club as it is one of the few things in Cuba that has been operational and successful longer than Fidel Castro. It was easy enough to get tickets at the hotel. At our table sat an elderly man and his grandson. They were from Canada. The old man had been a science advisor to Cuba and Castro since sometime in the early 60s. He had great admiration for Castro and the government. He was extolling the virtues of Cuba's veterinary research programs where he had been an advisor. He was convinced that Fidel was "the least corruptible politician he had ever met." He did not respond to my sarcastic response that, "It is difficult to corrupt someone who already controls everything including the money, how do you bribe them?"

Having experienced this, I came home with all sorts of conflicting ideas and feelings. I admired the revolution and Fidel for the good works--the education, the fact that I saw no one sorting through trash or garbage containers, the wide-spread access to health care, the fact that while more than a million people left, more than ten million stayed. Conversely I rejected the control of thought and daily life present throughout the society. It was easy to detect the fear of the government, especially the "bearded one", amongst the people. I

thought that the wonderful egalitarian foundations of the revolutionary society had been corrupted by the need to depend on tourism and the class distinctions this had created amongst the citizens. All of the faces I saw seemed happy, I wondered if they really were. It is clear that Che's perfect man doesn't exist, probably never did, and likely will not in the future. Socialism is failing, certainly communism never succeeded. Now, Cuba is a very poor Latin American country, run by a dictator, with a population that has been starved and beaten down in spirit to such an extent that they will never rise up against the current state leadership.

The first trip allowed me to meet many people. I thought that I now had more confidence in my ability to get along in the country. Being in Cuba would not make me anxious the second time, I didn't fear the ubiquitous police officers, and I recognized that they could be helpful, not threatening. I realized that in the two weeks I was there, I never saw any soldiers or military vehicles. I had seen lots of police officers, both young men and women; and there were the members of the interior military guarding embassies and government buildings. These were no different than the Park Police in Washington, D.C. I had learned how to cope with the street hustlers, both the *jineteras* (young women looking to have and show you a good time) and the *jineteros* (young men typically wanting to sell you cigars very cheap or persuade you to come eat at their mothers wonderful *paladar* (private home used as restaurant). After a few months I was itching to go back and really begin to learn more about these people and their lives.



Steve, a photographer and friend, once told me that he wanted to go to Cuba. He said that he could fix it up for us to go. I told him that if he could arrange the trip, I would help finance the travel. That obviously did not come to pass, but he still wanted to go. My wife who had taken the first trip was not anxious to return to Cuba, so I called up this old contact and he was excited to accompany me to Cuba. A third person whom I did not know, Ira, then called, having heard about our trip, and wanting to go along. I said sure, so the three of us planned to meet in Cancun and fly together from there to Havana. Our flight this time was full of adults and college students from all over the US. They were going on a trip sponsored by Witness for Peace, and they planned to spend two weeks in a sort of cultural exchange and language training experience. This was decidedly different from last year's flight. This time there was one young man who kept shouting, "Anyone going to Varadero?" He was met by blank looks and was disappointed not to find someone to share his cab for the hour and half ride to Varadero from the airport Jose Marti. You never know whom you will meet as tourists in Cuba. The travelers are quite diverse--sex tourists to Peace Witnesses.

Roberto--my friend, guide, and translator--was to meet us at the airport. He was outside the door and it seemed forever before my bags came through. I had two pieces of luggage that were a problem. A carry on bag that contained a new Pentium III chip and motherboard for Roberto's homemade computer, and a box of soap, medicines, and cigarette lighters--all putting me under suspicion of being a black marketer. After well more than an hour of mumbling and consultation amongst the ladies of Cuban customs two pounds of coffee and a 4 pack of soap seemed to remove suspicion from me. I got through.

The following day we went to the Fototeca to set up appointments to speak with the director about gaining their support for some photography workshops. We learned of an impending reception for a new exhibition of photographs by Magnum photographer Burt Glinn. Seems that Burt was a young news photographer in 1958 when he learned at a New Year's Eve party in NYC that Batista had fled. He went home packed his gear and headed to Havana the next day--New year's Day, 1959. We were able to obtain official invitations to the opening reception, set up further appointments, and open discussions regarding workshops.

Later that day we met Mario Mortimer. Mario was a retired news photographer for *Granma*, the weekly government newspaper that provides a bit of knowledge about Cuba, its politics in Latin America, and extols the virtues of other revolutionary activities in Mexico and Central America. It is also pretty heavy on anti-US and anti-imperialism rhetoric. It is fun to read. Not so much fun as the *National Enquirer*, but what does one expect for 25 cents. Mario had written Steve about a book Steve had written and Steve had kept his name and telephone number should he ever visit Cuba. We met at the hotel, had a Mojito, and gave away more film. We asked Mario to accompany us the next day to the reception at the Fototeca.

The reception at the Fototeca was packed with people. A representative of the government was present to make a speech. The press was there with a video camera covering this event. The photos were some of those made by Burt Glinn in the first months of the Revolution in Havana. When I met Mr. Glinn who was a courtly white haired man in his seventies he asked where I was from. When I told him he said, "You must meet Stephanie, she's from the same town."

Shortly after this, I noticed a young, blond, white skinned woman--the only one in the crowd. I approached her and said, "You must be Stephanie."

"Yes," she answered, 'how did you know?"

I said that she was the only woman there who looked as if she might be from Boone, NC. She laughed and said, "No, I am from Minnesota, but I went to college there." Turns out she had studied photography in the same department in which I had taught, had left to seek her career in New York and had obtained a job as Burt Glinn's assistant at Magnum!

Another friend from the Fototeca asked if I wanted to meet Roberto Salas. "You bet," I exclaimed. Salas is fascinating. He speaks English with the accent of his birthplace--Brooklyn, NY. He was eighteen years old, working in his father's photography business when he learned of the revolution's success. He hopped a plane at Idlewild Airport on January 2, 1959 and returned to Havana that day. His father Osvaldo came a short time later. Roberto did not return to the USA for 38 years. He made many of the historical images of the revolution and its leaders that are still seen regularly today. He was the only war correspondent for Cuba during the Viet Nam conflict, spending several years in North Viet Nam. He lives in Havana, travels widely, and is still actively doing his photography. He invited us to meet him several days later at a gallery where he was exhibiting his work.

I then noted an elderly man sitting to one side and realized that this was Alberto Diaz Guitierrez, the famed "Korda" who made the

classic image of Che Guevara that is seen everywhere in Cuba. I introduced myself to him and he asked if I would like to see "the photos."

I said, "Absolutely if you don't mind."

He led the way into a small gallery space in the Fototeca that contained a portion of the permanent collection. About half of the images were his, there were others by one or the other Salas, Corrales, or others. He talked about each photo, whether or not he liked the print, reminiscing about the time and circumstances when he made the image. It was a wonderful experience being in the presence of a genuine legend, having him discuss his photos, and talk about his experiences. Korda died while in Paris, France in May 2002. I am very fortunate to have had this experience.

On Thursday I visited Juan and Margarita, the artist and his wife that we had met the first visit. By now my wife had arranged an art exhibition and photography exhibition for us and I had a letter inviting Juan to come to the US to participate. I arrived about eleven AM. Julio, Margarita's father was up and about. I had barely noticed him the previous year when he had been still grieving his wife's death. This time he was more cheerful and interested in talking. He fetched a key, unlocked a large bureau, and rummaged about in it for a minute or two. When he stood up he had retrieved a bottle of Scotch whiskey that he had been saving for an occasion. We had Scotch on the rocks, and Margarita popped some popcorn. This was quite convivial and Julio started showing me some of his old family photos. He was especially proud of one showing all four of his children. There were two other children, a handsome young man and a young girl.

"Who are these children?" I asked.

Julio smiled and said, "That is Che's second daughter and Camilo, his son."

"You are joking," I responded.

Margarita pitched in, "No, That is Aleida, Che's wife, and that is my mother, Lolita. They were best friends."

"You have more photos like this?" I asked, incredulous that they were so casual about such a thing.

"Oh yes, many more, muchos photos," was the answer.

"Can I return Sunday and look at some more of them?" I asked.

"Yes, you come Sunday, we will have the photos and we will go see Jeffrey," said Margarita.

"Who is Jeffrey?"

"Jeffrey works at the consul, he can help us arrange our trip to the United States," replied Margarita.

"And I will invite my doctor, you will like him," chimed in Julio, "He is the director of the cardiology hospital."

I was stunned as I left in a cab headed for the Galleria Acacia to meet Steve, Ira, and Roberto Salas. I had been with people who claimed to be close friends of Che Guevara and his family, acquainted with someone high in the US Special Interests Section, and the patient and close friend of the Director of the National Cardiovascular Institute. My head was spinning at how casual and natural all this was to them.

Roberto Salas had on blue jeans and a black leather motorcycle jacket. He looked as if he were an artist giving a talk to several people--Steve and Ira--in a New York Gallery. The gallery space was large and airy. Located in Havana Centro just across the street from the Capitolio. He had a display of black and white nudes on exhibition. He talked about the models, said that he always tried to hire dancers for models since they had such good slender builds and instinctively knew how to move and pose. His model was fifteen or sixteen years old he told us. He thought this was all right because her mother co-signed the contract and model release, and was present for all the shoots. His photographs were ink jet prints of images he had manipulated in Photoshop so that they combined architectural details of Havana Vieja with the nude. They were extremely well done and were quite sensual, some were down right erotic.

Salas told us that his gallery director in the US had told him, "For each architectural photo you sell, I can sell ten nudes!" Shrugging his shoulders, he added, "I guess it's true, sex sells."

After all this in one day I was tired. I returned to the hotel and took a nap. That night I told Ira about my visit to Juan and Margarita's, he said he really wanted to go on Sunday and see the photos. This

caused us some conflict because Roberto's wife had invited us to the final exam recital of her dance class. She taught dancing and had a class of children and teenagers who were at different levels. We decided that Steve would go to the dance recital and the other two would visit the folks in Miramar.

On Friday we took a brief drive into the countryside and stopped at Bauta. There were a couple of kids playing in the street. Their father had made them masks, sort of cut out like bunny masks with big ears. They were chasing each other in the street. Turns out it was Marylys's birthday and this was their birthday party. I took their picture and bought them some candy. There was a chunky black woman who also wanted her picture taken. She said she worked in Havana. I asked what her job was and she answered, "Asking." She was a beggar who worked the Plaza Cathedral area in Havana Vieja.

Two more young women on bicycles came by, wanted to know if we would take them to Havana. I said, "No." We finished our cold drinks and headed back to Havana alone.

Saturday we drove to Vinales and Pinar del Rio. The Vinales Valley is beautiful. There are many Royal Palms, other forms of tropical vegetation and thatch-roofed cabins where the campesinos live. This makes for a very pretty, quaint scene. Large fields of sugar cane were everywhere. Close by the sugar cane fields were the tall stacks of the sugar refinery plants. In this region all of the cane is harvested by hand, loaded onto carts drawn by oxen, and then taken to the scales for weighing. The peasants were more than happy to stop and pose for a photograph. We stopped in Pinar Del Rio, which is a small to medium sized town, certainly not a city, for lunch. Roberto

knew of a paladar, which did in fact have good chicken and very cold beer. We returned to Havana on the highway. A segment of the highway is designed with pull-offs for airplanes and could function as a runway to disperse the Cuban Air Force should that become a military necessity. Fidel has always been ready to wage war it seems.

Sunday was our big day in Miramar. We were going to see Julio's pictures, meet the doctor, and visit Jeffrey the consular person. We got to Juan and Margarita's and they immediately pulled out the photos. There were many family pictures. The family had lived in Santa Clara. Julio had been a restaurateur and "Lolita", his wife, had been a socially and politically active person. Supporters of the Revolution and hunted by Batista's soldiers they had moved to the country. Their country home in Las Villas had been the unofficial headquarters of most of the guerrillas that were infiltrating into the Santa Clara area before the decisive battle in the Revolution. Aleida March had stayed there and conducted her revolutionary and guerrilla activities along with Lolita. There were many pictures of these soldiers in the boxes. There were also pictures of Aleida and Lolita before and after the Revolution. Lolita eventually became a major force in the Cuban Women's Association, one of the more influential official post-Revolutionary organizations.

There was a photo of the "Pickin' Chicken," Julios's restaurant. There were photos of Julio in uniform standing along with Camilo Cienfuegos, Juan Almeida, and others. He participated in the battle at Santa Clara, and then had gone to Havana with the advance troops to clear the way for Fidel's triumphant "Entrada de Habana" on January 8, 1959. Julio had been offered a commission and significant position in the post-Revolutionary army but declined. Instead, he returned to



Santa Clara and managed a manufacturing concern for Che Guevara. Lolita had remained active and had held several official jobs along with her activities in the women's group. This was the first time Julio had looked at any of these pictures since Lolita's death three years earlier. He was very nostalgic, but clearly enjoying reviving a lot of old memories.

His friend Llerena Rojas came in. Llerena is the Director of the cardiac catheterization laboratory at the Instituto de Cardiovascular Diseases, located in Vedado. He came armed with a bottle of Scotch whisky, so we had another Cuban brunch--Scotch on the rocks and popcorn. We enjoyed talking cardiology and he invited me to come to the hospital for a visit. We set a time for later in the week.

After a good lunch at El Ajibe, we went to Jeffrey's. Jeffrey's house is one of the fine old homes that line Fifth Avenue. Many of these have been restored and are maintained for use by various embassies or foreign businesses. Jeffrey's home like many others had a tall chain link fence around it. We rang the buzzer and a tall slender middle-aged man in jeans came out to unlock the gate and let us in.

I attempted to introduce myself, but he said, "Save introductions for when we are inside, it's best to keep a low profile here." I later realized that it wasn't me that needed the low profile, but Juan and Margarita. We were all assured that we were on television that evening.

I explained what we hoped to do with the art exhibition, Juan and Jeffrey talked a lot in Spanish, and then we got a tour of the home. Impressive digs for the vice-consul. Jeffrey and his wife,

Jennifer, have an impressive collection of Cuban and other Caribbean art. That is how they had become acquainted with Juan. They had purchased several paintings from him and were pleased that he might have an opportunity to come to the United States. We spent several hours with them and then excused ourselves to head back to the Hotel. (Note: Jeffrey is presently the acting Ambassador to Cuba; he is not a political appointee, but a career State Department Diplomat.)

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### On the Road

The next week we took a road trip to Cienfuegos and Trinidad. The countryside was pretty. We saw many of the "*escuelas en campo*." These are the schools where high school aged kids go for a year or two to study and work in agricultural endeavors. Apparently when you go and for how long have to do with test scores, location of your school and how well placed one's parents are. We stopped at one field where a group of what appeared to be eleven or twelve year olds were pulling weeds under the supervision of a middle-aged woman, their teacher. They apparently were there for one month of "campo." We made a few pictures and headed on. Later information indicated that another prime function of the *escuelas in campo* is educating the young about sex; primarily an unsupervised laboratory course.

Cienfuegos was a beautiful old Caribbean colonial town with large, restored, pastel colored buildings on its central plaza. There is a large theater, a couple of government buildings, and a tourist shop. This place sold a few post cards, posters, or picture books and not much else. Next-door was a small lunchroom and ice cream parlor. We had a dish of ice cream in the outdoor dining area. The plaza was full with many children headed home from school, several guided tour

groups, and small groups of teenagers just hanging out. We decided to head onto Trinidad for the night.

In Trinidad we stayed at a *casa particular*. The house belonged to the mother of Ricardo, who was a miller and had a corn grinding facility in the back yard. The entire upstairs was divided into three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bathroom. There was plenty of cold beer and bottled water in the refrigerator available on the honor system. There was a garage in which we could lock the car, and we felt quite safe while there. We went to the only place Roberto knew for supper. Turned out to be a big tourist hotel full of Canadian and European tourists. The dinner was a mediocre buffet. We were tired so we went ahead and ate, then turned in for the night.

Spent the next morning walking about taking pictures, and then we went out to the beach for brunch. This was a real treat. The hotel was nice, there was a mix of Cuban and European tourists, and the food was good. There is no question but what the beaches of Cuba are beautiful, but I remember the person who told me, "Cuba is for the budget minded tourist." I don't think there are many repeat tourist visitors.

We drove from Trinidad to Santa Clara in the afternoon. The Escambray Mountains are beautiful. We passed through several small villages along the way. I was struck that each had a school and a clinic right in the center of town. This is one of the proud accomplishments of the revolution--the improvement in literacy and in public health. Freedom of information may not be a strength of the revolutionary government, but just about everyone can read and write. Similarly there may not be much medical treatment beyond herbal, natural

remedies in most of the clinics and farmacias, but there is good advice regarding nutrition, personal hygiene, first aid, and dental care. Proper screening and available pre-natal care have resulted in a quite low infant mortality rate. No doubt the virtual absence of drug abuse among the people also improves the infant mortality rates.

A day or two after returning from the road trip, I visited Llerena at the cardiovascular institute. The hospital itself was somewhat dark and dingy. It reminded me of several old Indian Health Service hospitals or state tuberculosis sanatoria I had visited in the past. I was taken to the cardiac catheterization laboratory. I met some physicians, one the older brother of Llerena. He was a radiologist who performed the official interpretation of each film. He had started the program in the past, but it had been taken over by younger cardiologists, a similarity between Cuba and many American hospitals. The cardiac catheterization lab equipment was old, but not as old as what I had used in the hospital where I had worked in Virginia. I watched the cardiologists perform several procedures. Technically they were as proficient as what one encounters in the USA. They re-use every thing. Catheters, balloons, guide wires, needles, syringes, scalpels-- everything. I asked for what they had the greatest need. The answer was shocking. "Information!" A year later while giving a talk on this subject in Mexico, I was challenged by someone who reminded me that that not all the worthwhile medical information in the world comes from the US. I think the point was well made. The embargo limits journals and books from the US, but there is also the control of information and press by the Cuban government, which limits access from other parts of the world--not to excuse the embargo from a stupid thing, preventing the spread of ideas, but to acknowledge the culpability of the Cuban government as well in this endeavor.

The physicians are allowed local e-mail, but only very limited Internet. They can't subscribe to international or American medical journals. They treasure visits from foreign physicians whom they pump for information about procedures and treatments. They get their basic education in Cuba and then spend a year in Spain for advanced training in invasive and interventional cardiology. They perform about 250 by-pass operations a year, one thousand heart catheterizations, and about 250 angioplasty procedures. Almost all of these are PTCA's; stents are infrequently used because of the cost. Llerena makes thirty dollars a month.

On our final day, Ira and I went over to Juan and Margarita's for a brief visit. It was quite festive because Julio's son, Julito, was visiting from Miami. Margarita and Julio had not seen him for over a year, so they were happy. Today we had vodka and Sprite along with popcorn or fried plantain. After an hour or so Ira, Juan, and I walked over to Bobby's house. It was about a mile away in what appeared to be a somewhat less affluent neighborhood than Julio's home. There were kids playing ball in the street, several men working on their cars alongside the curb--a fairly typical lower-middle class Sunday afternoon scene. Bobby met us at the door, and we went inside. He was suffering from severe back and leg pain, no doubt from degenerative disk disease. He was being treated with anti-inflammatory drugs and rest. There was no thought that he might undergo surgery. He had had a couple of epidural injections of corticosteroids and thought that he was on the mend. He showed us clippings of his reviews from the Latin Jazz Festival in Los Angeles the previous summer, along with a scrapbook of other pictures and

clippings. Bobby had some pictures with the track and field great, Alberto Juantorena. Apparently they were on the same track team in secondary school. Although Juantorena went to become a great Olympic champion, Bobby had been the "High Jump Champion" of Latin America at one time. He is also an accomplished artist who draws and paints. In the 1970's he was responsible for the development of the Cuban Jazz Festival. The official stance of the government was that jazz music was unworthy. Bobby and other musicians were able to change that opinion, and today Cuban jazz is popular the world over.

Juan told us that Jeffrey had called and said there was no problem with them coming to the USA for the art exhibition. Based on all that I had heard, read or knew I was still dubious that this would actually happen. I asked Juan if he was sure.

He replied, "No hay problema!"

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Cuban Guests

It is now six months since I was last in Cuba. It is the last week of spring. I received an e-mail this morning from a friend of Margarita's in Miami telling me that Juan and Margarita were back safely home in Havana. I suspect they are tired. They have had a big trip to America. True to his word, Jeffrey facilitated their visas and they had no problem coming to America. As Juan told me last winter, "No hay problema, we are coming!"

The trip was really a very exciting thing for all four of us. Juan had worked very hard producing art. We had corresponded throughout the spring and I had gotten stretcher frames and framing materials for all the art. He brought his canvases rolled and his monotype prints in a portfolio. We worked hard for three days getting all this done so that the show could be hung in a timely and attractive manner. We had a lot of art to hang because I had operated on the principle that in the end, they would be denied, if not by the Cubans then by the new more conservative pols in our government. My wife laughed and said, "Hey, they are coming, they have an in with their government."

Her faith was well placed as they arrived on the scheduled flight in Norfolk, Virginia, without a hitch. The box of paintings had been left in Montego Bay by Air Jamaica, but it actually arrived earlier than Juan! He was panicked until I realized that it might be in the baggage office and found it there. They were tired as they had visited with cousins in Atlanta the night before and had stayed up all night talking to relatives they had not seen in seven years.

The first and major obstacle was overcome with more ease than anticipated. Juan and Margarita speak very little English, Margarita more than Juan. My wife and I speak very little Spanish, me more than she. We had a lot of laughs as we tried to talk. I did learn that immersion learning of a language surely works. My goal for the coming year is to acquire reasonable facility with conversational Spanish. Menus were not that difficult. I was shocked though by how rare Spanish books, maps, tourist information, and menus were in Williamsburg. We even ate in a large Mexican restaurant that was full of Latinos, and not even they had a menu in Spanish! We each would

head out armed with our dictionaries; with some patience and good humor, we managed amazingly well.

It was interesting to see their response to things that they had not previously experienced. They had their first glass of tomato juice at the International House of Pancakes, where we went sort of tongue in cheek. They loved it. They also had their first waffles there. We could never get past *waff-luhs* as the pronunciation; it was easier for us to change than to press the issue. They had never eaten from a salad bar, and these proved very popular. Having a pizza delivered to their hotel room late at night was a new treat, only surpassed by the "erotic movie" they watched on the hotel's cable television. Every day brought another new experience for all four of us.

The art exhibition was very successful. Many people came to the reception. We had had a lot of good publicity, including an interview at a local television station. That was a fascinating experience for them, sitting in the studio for the interview and seeing an image of one of Juan's paintings on the TV screen. Sales were good at the opening and Juan was happy. The next evening we had a spectacular party given in our honor by some good friends. One of the attendees was from Cuba and that was a treat for all three Cubans. Sunday we had a gallery talk and had a big turn out with several more Cuban expatriates who were living in coastal Virginia. Again, a real treat for all. I found that I could follow along quite well with the Cuban Americans who did not usually speak Spanish; I was lost when it came to understanding Juan in conversation.

Once this was all behind us we headed for our home in the mountains. Once we were home, Juan wanted some art supplies so we



went to a new retail store and he was overwhelmed by all of the paints, pastels, watercolors, papers, and canvases that were available. When we got home from shopping he immediately set up an area to paint on our porch and he painted every day after that. It was like a compulsion. He would become fidgety and then paint for several hours and then he would be relaxed. One day he asked if I had any wood. We pulled out some scrap lumber and plywood; he rummaged about through my tools and then set to work. Two days later there was this colorful six-foot tall guitar that we now proudly display amongst other sculptures in our front yard.

We took an overnight trip to Asheville. The second day we visited an art gallery that has a sort of international cachet and Juan showed pictures of his work and clippings about his shows to the owner. She was quite impressed with the paintings and agreed to show some of his work! It was as if everything was predestined, it all just fell into place. He was pleased to have representation in America. We were pleased that we had been able to facilitate this, I felt as if I was a genuine "patron of the arts."

The next day we had a long conversation about Cuba, Fidel, and life there. Juan has no intention of defecting. He is a Cuban. He feared that in Miami he would get much pressure to remain in America. He told me that he could not leave his parents, dog, and home. In many respects his life is better there than it would be here. If he were here in the US it would be much more difficult to have the freedom to paint and live from sales. There would be more competition; both from other artists and from the economic pressures he would suddenly feel. He is fearful of what will happen when Castro is gone. There really are no other strong leaders waiting in the wings to shoulder responsibility

for leadership. Most of the strong leaders or the other popular leaders are gone--framed and executed, or in jail, or in other countries. He fears that there will be near anarchy for sometime. He is also fearful of Cuba becoming open to United States business interests. He does not want to go back to the days when the US controlled the politics and business and the Mafia promoted and controlled the casinos, prostitution, and pornography industries. Those were days of less than 50% literacy and virtually no health care. Most people lived in abject poverty and when the wealthy and upper middle class fled post revolution, these poor people moved into the government seized homes. Many fear that the Miami Cubans will return to claim what they believe to be their lawful property. He fears that this will lead to chaos and violence, another civil and class war. He believes the "bearded one" has spent his time figuring out how to maintain his control and power, and has given little thought to the orderly transfer of any influence or power. Juan shook his head and said, "Ummm, many problems."

The next morning we drove them to the airport and they left for a visit with friends and relatives in Miami.

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Workshop

It is now one year later. Juan and Margarita have been living in Barcelona, Spain, for the past 9 months. Julio is visiting with his son in Hialeah, Florida. I have just returned from a month's visit to Cuba with six students who joined my Cuba Photography workshop. I had

decided that I had enjoyed being in Cuba and doing photography there so much, that students would like it and that it would be a worthwhile experience for them. Recruiting students for the trip was a difficult proposition. Travel has been generally down and Cuba has achieved "Axis of Terror" status, both contributing to fewer students willing to undertake international workshops. I became acquainted with a history professor who had taken a group of students there last year and had made some contacts in Havana. The University had a permit for travel to Cuba from the US Treasury Department, so a lot of the hard work was done.

We arranged housing in a private home that was licensed to rent rooms to tourists. Tony, the landlord had connected with several different educational enterprises, and it seemed that most of his tenants were there for that sort of purpose. During our stay, several dentists from Ecuador came and went, being in Cuba for continuing dental education programs. The home was the last home of ***Faustino Perez***. Although all of the rooms had been renovated to include private bathrooms, mine was Faustino's old room. He was an important medical doctor/revolutionary who had been active in Havana in the fifties, and then had joined Fidel in Mexico to return on the *Granma* in 1957 survive the landing, and go to the Sierra Maestre with the few revolutionaries who did make it. Since there was great question as to whether any had survived, especially Castro, something had to be done to prove the vitality of the movement. Faustino was sent to Havana to fetch a news reporter and photographer to document the rebels and their camps. He escorted Herbert Mathews of the New York Times back to Oriente Province; shortly thereafter, the first photographs of the rebels in the camp were published, documenting the survival of Fidel and some of his key associates.

Faustino's daughter now owns the home and she and her husband, Tony, live there.

Located in Habano Centro, the streets surrounding the home comprise a slum by most any definitions. Very few people go to work; there are two state food stores within sight of each other. Famous shopping streets like Neptuno and Galiciana are nearby, but the stores are all run down, what merchandise they have is very cheap and dowdy. The streets are dirty and littered with trash. This a difference between this area and Habana Vieja, the larger tourist area in Havana. There the restaurants are fancier, well beyond the means of the average Cuban. The Hotels are nice, and the decay of the buildings is a bit quaintly mainly because they are older. There are certainly as many poor people, but there are also shops and galleries, museums, and beautiful plazas, which make Vieja a much nicer area. We purposely chose to stay in the other type of reality-based neighborhood. Slum living was a new and very different experience for the students. Within a few days they knew everyone in the neighborhood and had children calling at the door each afternoon wanting some student to come play, take their pictures, or give them some gum. That we would purposely choose to stay there was incomprehensible to Roberto who thought we should be in nicer apartments in a cleaner part of town. After a few days he began to understand the difference in our goals as compared with the more typical tourist goals.

Centro is a very interesting place in that it is at the heart of the Cuban reality. I walked down Neptuno and Galiciana streets; both of them are extremely busy thoroughfares. There are many large department stores along these streets, most of which are closed.

Some are open on the first level only, and are selling things like small appliances, fans, cheap clothing articles, or small amounts of soda pop, beer, and rum. The signs are still there, most of the neon is broken, and none have been repainted since the 1950's. It is like a repopulated ghost town. As you look down the side streets you see people sitting in doorways, children playing in the street, and an occasional scrawny dog. A common scene is to see a makeshift table upon which a hot game of dominos is being played while alongside two other men are laying in the street half under their 1950's vintage car, rebuilding the suspension with a collection of used truck and tractor parts. It is amazing how resourceful the people are, one wonders if it would be easier to volunteer to repair the myriad potholes that pockmark Havana's streets.

On the street where we stayed one of the intriguing features was that no one worked. Well, there was the man who sold old postcards in his doorway, another who sold small cookies and pastries out of the window, but no one appeared to go to work. Cuba is one of the few places where people can in fact survive without doing any work at all. You get basically the same thing for not working, as you would get for a modest job. Most of the small children went to school; you can spot them easily because of the uniforms they wear. There was a state store next door to our house, on the corner, where people would line up with their ration books and each day get a bag of corn meal, a bucket of milk, some rice, or sugar. At the other end of the block, across the street was an outdoor state market where people lined up for produce-either fruits (mangos or bananas) or vegetables (potatoes, onions, or garlic). The lines were invariably there, and seemed to never change. I attempted to take some photographs in the

larger of the two shops, the indoor market, but the man behind the counter emphatically said, "No!"

Within two days all of the students knew the names of the children who lived on the street. They also had met many of their parents and each had a good comfort level with one another. After getting home from school, the kids were ringing our bell shouting someone's name to get them to come out and play. I discovered that Cuban boys needed only a ball to make up a game with as much challenge and fun to them as a computer video game provided to my grand children. As we walked the streets taking photos and meeting people we rarely encountered any hostility. Even the hustlers while persistent were polite. Unfortunately there are now people who are poking through the garbage containers looking for abandoned clothing, bits of food, or anything else usable or sellable. Since this was my first intensive visit to this area I do not know whether this is a new development or not. People I talked with in the area thought it was a recent thing.

This hospitality and openness was much less evident in Cienfuegos. There the town seems smaller; there is a small commercial section and a large slum like area. The large Bauhaus like Russian-built apartment buildings are closer to the center of town, and there are many young people just standing around. The secondary school kids were more prevalent than the elementary ones in the parks and business areas. These are the ones who have had enough instruction in ideology to have great dislike of the "behemoth to the north", and its citizens. They don't want their pictures taken, they are curt, and will let one know quickly that they don't like the US or its citizens. Here the hustlers had less to sell, were more aggressive, and

on occasion somewhat scary to the female students. My initial impressions had been favorable, but I have to confess that it was a less pleasant place to stay overnight than to just pass through. Cienfuegos is a much smaller town than Havana-probably 50,000 people compared to five million souls in ad about Havana. Because Cienfuegos is such a beautiful place many tourist buses come through there. There are several tourist hotels that are quite large and located together almost in a large compound. I think thew tourists as groups are much more demanding and give all outsiders a sort of bad name, especially among the young.

On our end of month evaluations, all students suggested not returning to Cienfuegos. I am not sure about that because I believed it to be one of the most important times of the trip. Taking photographs of people on the street or in their homes in Havana is like going to one of the trout fishing farms here in the mountains where we live, the fish will bite anything. In Cienfuegos one has to get to know a person, talk to them, become friendly, learn something about them, while opening up about yourself and your intentions. After that, the success rate of making photographs goes way up. This may vary from standing and watching a street vender for a few minutes, purchasing a trinket, or spending an hour or two sitting at a bar. Once you make contact, one can often make an appointment to see them later for a photo, be invited to visit in their home, or accompany them to some interesting place they want you to see. I thought this was an essential obstacle for the students to overcome so we made a rule that they could not photograph any people of Cienfuegos without first asking their permission. Much grousing and grumbling came from the students, but they produced much better if fewer photographs.

In all of Cuba, the ennui is palpable. You don't just see people appearing bored and looking for things to fill their time, it is felt like an oppressive weight bearing down on everyone. Many of the young men told us that they didn't work, "I refuse to work for nothing," was a common refrain. "I only want to leave here and go live in Miami." "What is the weather like in Detroit, Michigan?" another group ask us. They had cousins with good jobs in the auto industry, and they wanted to go join them. As I walked the streets of Havana Centro the title of a country song by the late Townes Van Zant kept repeating itself in my mind, "Waitin' around to Die." I saw many average citizens who had this as their main occupation.

Our next stop was Trinidad, only a short drive from Cienfuegos. It is one of the most picturesque places in Cuba. There seem to be considerably fewer young people out in the streets. The principle occupation in Trinidad appears to be sitting inside behind the iron grates of the windows surveying the scene. It is both symbolic and telling I think, that a common sight is a bird in a cage. Even the younger people can be seen out on the street with their caged bird. Everyone is friendly, they seem at peace, and there is virtually no hostility to tourists. It is smaller, the CDRs and the Communist Party Headquarters are very visible, and many revolutionary symbols or pictures are seen through the windows. Once again we stayed at a *casa particular*, the same one we had visited 18 months earlier. Ricardo was glad to see us, even happier to fill all his rooms and those of a neighbor during the off-season. It worked well for all. I don't think his corn mill is operational any longer; he now makes his living as innkeeper and chef. He prepared breakfast and two excellent meals for us. In spite of the excellence of the meals, there was general



consensus amongst the group the next few days that my bringing Lomotil and a large supply of antibiotics was a good call.

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Sugar

One of the interesting places on the road to Playa Giron is "Central Australia." This is a very large sugar refinery, right on the railroad, that is now shut down and pretty much abandoned. There is a small village there, a school, and a transit system (horse and wagon). There are two old steam locomotives, one made in the USA, the other in Germany, now sitting abandoned. They should be in some museum is what I felt. I made a few photographs and walked up toward the sugar mill. As I got to the open gate and started onto its immediate grounds, a man came out and told me. "No photos!" When I didn't back up, but asked him "Why," he ran to fetch another man. This man was wearing a uniform and he re-enforced the first man, so I smiled, thanked them, and retreated, as it seemed they were really serious about this. Roberto told me, "They do not like you to take a picture of the mills."

Another sugar area near Trinidad is the Valle de Indigenes. I decided that we should go there, visit some of the old sugar plantations and see some fields of sugar cane. Unfortunately we were there at the end of the harvest so there were no *macheteros* to see. These men do back breaking labor cutting cane by hand in the tropical sun, but all had been cut. In spite of this, there were no refineries operating. All we visited were as shut down and abandoned looking as Central Australia had been. Of interest were the abandoned homes of prior Spanish sugar plantation owners which were in terrible states of disrepair. One had been converted to a small restaurant and tourist

shop, but the building itself was terribly dilapidated. A man drew back a large drape to show us a gorgeous fresco, which was fading and mildewing in spite of the attempts by the locals to cover and protect it. Each of these plantations had a small village, a broken train, and a run down refinery. I thought for sure I could get some photos in the refinery at one of these places. Each had a couple of attendants who insisted that I not take pictures. When I asked them why they simply shrugged and shook their heads. I involved Roberto in the conversation, thinking that his command of the language plus his being Cuban would change their minds. This had absolutely no impact. Finally they told us that the sugar industry is very important to the government and its process must be kept secret. Sugar is being abandoned by the government, which has no money to rebuild or maintain the industrial basis of sugar production and remains dependent on human labor for its cultivation. Once the Russian sugar subsidy was gone, Cuba's sugar could not compete on the world market. There are no potential partners or joint ventures that are interested in re-kindling the sugar industry considering the investment and return aspects of the situation. As a consequence of this, Cuba has based its economic future on Caribbean tourism.

This may be the only decision to make at this time, but the Cuban tourist industry has a long way to go to catch up with other Caribbean resorts. I am far from expert, but most of the resorts are not near so elegant or complete as their competition on other islands or in Mexico. Varadero is compared to Cancun. This may be a long-term goal, and there are some upscale hotels, but there is a long way to go. While near Trinidad we stayed at Costa Sur. Built by the Russians in the late 1979s, renovated by Cubans in the mid-90s, and located half mile from Ancon Beach, this resort is marginal. The pool

was empty and didn't work, the food was sub-standard, the beach was rocky and trashed, and the other facilities and amenities were minimal--pool table, gift kiosk, and beer stand. It was cheap though, but terribly boring. Bauhaus style architecture and no fun, but then neither Cuba nor its brand of socialism are about fun anymore. The same ennui from the streets of Havana hung over this hotel. The staff, the guests, and the few hangers-on there all seemed mildly but truly depressed--the staff because of their jobs and pay, the guests because of the surroundings and facilities, the hangers-on because of the general lack of action. I am an old beach bum and I can see no future for resorts like this--I am sure they make you glad to return to your job and work, but that's not much of a vacation. These resorts are indeed suited best for the "budget minded European tourist."

Recently I have read that the government in Cuba is tightening the screws on the Casa Particulars, they are raising the taxes, making new rules regarding the relationships between Cubans and tourists (non-Cubans) who are residing in the houses, and having police raids at night. This will no doubt force tourists into the hotels and create a sort of Cuban-tourist apartheid. While this may be good for the government and the growth of the tourist industry, it is just another body blow to the average Cuban, further weakening and impoverishing them. At this point it is hard to resolve whether their government or the US embargo is causing the most distress. The immediacy of the government's actions, the harshness of its decisions, and the isolation of the people make the Cuba situation look more and more like South Africa under an absolute dictator. Even at its worst there was an economy in South Africa, even if many did not directly participate in it.

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### The Next Phase

After two more photography workshops I had really become more informed as to what was happening in Cuba. There were few major changes. I had by chance encountered two gentlemen who worked for the Cultural Ministry as archivists and photographic historians. Both were delightful people and were of real assistance to the students and the workshops success. Leysis and I had become good friends. She was the young photographer I had met years before and she had become a bit of a success with her photography. She helped the workshop students and assisted me in my work. Her previous occupation had been "English teacher" so her ability to translate and teach was very good. I asked Rufino and Ramon if they would have interest in visiting the US and perhaps being guest faculty at our university. They were very excited with this prospect. I brought most of their information home, talked with our International Education Deans and after several months we had two visas for them. Apparently only eleven visas were granted that year to institutions of higher education. So we were justifiably pleased. It turned out that it was more difficult to get them permission to leave Cuba and stay here than it was to get permission from the US to allow them entry. It all worked out they were well received and made a big contribution the semester they were here. After that year educational travel ended. The Bush administration simply shut it down. Lawrence Wilkerson referred to all of this along with the embargo as the "dumbest international policy the US had ever had." I managed to return for an exhibition of my photos a year later, having a show at the "Espacio Pequeno" in the Center de Cultura y Revolucion. The look on Ramon's face as I delivered my little speech in Spanish was wonderful, little did he know that Leysis had been prepping me all week for the speech. I was

pleased when "Gonzo" told me my images did not look like a foreigner had made them. He said, "They look like the work of a Cuban photographer." Then, Cuba was done.

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Nothing is ever Done!

In 2012 I was approached by some students who wanted to go to Cuba. They knew as I did that group travel had become fairly easy under Obama who had rejected the harsher Republican stance against travel to Cuba. There were other student trips planned for the summer, so I thought we should plan to get out of the mountains of North Carolina in midyear. After talking to the people in International Studies it was doable. I called Nelson who was now the Director of the Fototeca in Havana, and he said that he could get us the necessary Cuban visas. It was now more difficult to get into the country than in the past. (The government had figured out that they could generate income from tourist and others coming to Cuba.) So on December 26, 2011 we headed for Miami. Spent one night in a hotel near the airport and headed out in the morning. The flight to Cuba was about an hour. We went on a charter airline from American Airlines. It was a nice flight, landed easily at José Martí Airport, and went through the same drill as in the past. Roberto met us, and we piled into a large van and headed for Havana Centro. Once again we stayed at what was now "Casa Amada" with a nice sign outside. Tony and Amada were now living on the Canary Islands where Tony was doing drug studies. One of the daughters was running the place. The rooms and bathrooms had been upgraded a bit--the towels were thicker and longer.

There were many changes. To list a few:

1. New buses from China had replaced the old "Camellos", many ran on propane;

2. There were many more tourists, the Americans were all in tightly supervised groups; all led by government employed guides.

3. There were many more stores and shops selling kitschy souvenirs, all stamped with "made in China" markers. Obispo street now looked like a main street in Gatlinburg, TN than the barren place full of boarded up shops and stories it was in 2001.

4. More hustlers, more police, and more Paladars for eating.

5. Sex tourism is once again a big business.

6. The Plaza Vieja had cafes with out door tables and dining; mostly sandwiches, soft drinks, or beer.

7. Many places that we had been able to talk our way into in the early 2000's were now clearly closed or had significant admissions fees.

In spite of this our group of ten averaged walking 6 miles a day (range 3.7 to 14.0). The group made more than 50,000 digital exposures. I retired and now Cuba is really done.

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