

THREE WEEKS IN CUBA

Introduction

After returning from a three-week visit to Cuba, we were besieged with questions from friends and associates. We consequently decided to edit our journals into a coherent account of our trip.

My wife Beryl, my son, Mario, and I were invited to the wedding of Beryl's great nephew Seba who was getting married to Yamile in Havana in August of 2002. We decided to attend. We obtained a license through the Institute for Cuban Studies to study Cuban art. We planned a three-week itinerary that would take us after the wedding to Santiago de Cuba that was recently given one of Anthony's paintings by its sister city Oakland, California.

The other family members who converged on Havana for the wedding included Saul (Beryl's brother) his ex-wife, Nina, their son Greg (father of Seba), Greg's wife Christina and their son Andres, Greg's daughter Nicole, Nicole's aunt Stephanie and Stephanie's boyfriend Rudy,.

Havanna

Evening, Monday, August 5, 2002

Beryl: We are actually here after a grueling journey that began in Oakland at 11:25 last night. We were up all night and had very little to eat before arriving here. Once in Cancun, we remained trapped in the airport for seven hours waiting for a DiverMex travel agent to arrive with our Cubana tickets.

We have already met several interesting people. The first was a young high school Special Ed teacher and football coach who we talked to at the Oakland airport. He is in love with Cuba and travels here for every vacation break partly to watch the baseball. He told us that he pays for the trip by selling Cuban cigars to Americans at a high profit.

We are staying a casa particular, an apartment owned by two sisters, Margo and Amalia, who speak excellent English. It is located on the Prado, on the seventh floor with panoramic views of Habana Vieja from the windows and balcony.

Anthony: We discovered a neighbor who cooks special meals in his house and reserved three dinners for eight PM. Then we went for a walk along the Prado. The wide pedestrian avenue sits above the traffic lanes that run on either side and reaches from the Malecon to the Capitolio. We passed kids playing 'kick the can' or sliding swiftly over the smooth walkway on improvised scooters cobbled together from scrap wood with bearing casings for wheels. On either side, anachronistic vehicles sped by billowing smoke. Above them, we glimpsed handsome colonial buildings in various states of decay.

It turns out that the chef of our lobster dinner is a black doctor. He graciously presented Beryl with a richly scented "Mariposa" flower that he explained is the flower of Cuba. It has many delicate white blossoms bursting out of a tight cluster of leaves that are scented like gardenias or tuber roses. We later realized that with this one meal our host had earned the equivalent of four months salary working as a doctor in Cuba.

Tuesday, August 6, 2002

I woke up this morning with a bad sinus headache from the car fumes drifting up from the Prado.

We began our exploration of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes with the Cuban collection. This is a beautiful piece of modern architecture with lots of light and space. There is so much to see that we got through less than a third of the collection.

Much was high quality and reflective of worldwide movements. Surrealism holds a much stronger sway than in North America with some exceptional pieces by Ever Fonsceca Guantanamo, Rafael Zarza with his Tauromania obsession and one of our favorites, the understated work of Tomas Sanchez.

There appears to be a strong Santaria influence, especially in works by Nelson Dominquez and with a delightful assemblage of branches, leaves, mud and cloth by Ketto (Alexis Leyua Machado)--possibly in works by Maria Magdalena.

Hotel Sevilla

Beryl: We got exhausted from looking at so much art and went to the Hotel Sevilla where we had lunch in the garden restaurant. Mario had fish. We were serenaded by three musicians who played a Carlos Puebla song after we tipped them for the request. It seems like everyone we see is hustling to make some dollars from tourists to supplement their meager incomes.

Catedral de Habana

Anthony: We walked over to the cathedral which Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier, aptly described as 'music turned to stone'. The cathedral's interior is as graceful and harmonic as its Borromini derived facade. The plaza has been restored and is as satisfying as anywhere in Europe. Europe comes to mind often in colonial Havana. The diffuse light over the changing water is reminiscent of the warm, hazy light over the Southern Mediterranean.

Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes – International Collection

Wednesday, August 7, 2002

This morning, we visited the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes historical collection from around the world. It serves as a counterpart to the museum that we visited yesterday. The collection includes some North American painters like Walter Gray, John Henry and Childe Hassam and a number of Latin American colonial works. There is a stunning cityscape of the Cathedral in Mexico City (1848) by Ignacio Serrano and a bizarre religious work by Esquela Quintana, 'El Divino Pastor' –a centrally located Christ-child seated holding a rope tied to a lamb. On the left of the picture, red bolts of lightning strike a cowering beast that is clearly the devil. The Christ-child wears a red heart on his breast ringed with thorns with bursts of flames shooting out surmounted by a cross. This work illustrates my theory that religious iconography is a precursor of surrealism.

The big surprise is an enormous collection of Piranesi engravings including his spectacular 'Veduti de Roma e Italia' and his 'Carceri Invenzione' (1763). The later is a nightmare architectural fantasy of immense power and virtuosity. It is also a precursor of Surrealism.

I found myself so influenced by these prints that the Centro Asturiano, where this collection is located, with its extravagant circular staircases became a three dimensional extension of Piranesi's bizarre fantasies. We were spiraling up through endless levels in a vast prison of the mind. The prison became tangible when we entered the early Spanish collection with its severe portraits and masochistic saints. There is a splendid, though abraded, 'La Crucifixion con la Virgen y San Juan' attributed to El Greco. We also saw a very powerful Caravaggiesque 'San Sebastian Curando Por Santa Irene' by Taller de Ribera and several fine paintings by Eugenio Lucas Velasquez. Eugenio Lucas Velasquez is an excellent disciple of Goya whose work we first encountered in Castres, France at the Goya Museum last year (2001).

Among the Impressionists and Post Impressionists, there were a large number of Joaquin Sorollas. He has incredible facility but his value contrasts are excessive and tend to interrupt the luminosity of his color. I liked his 'Generalife Granada'.

The most relevant painting in this part of the collection was a view of the Malecon (close to where we are staying) as one looks across the Bahia de la Haban with a rose-pink afternoon light on the Castillo. Bright yachts sail out of the picture on the right and there, silhouetted on the Malecon, is a fashionable couple accompanied by two young women with children and a greyhound. It is a vibrant echo of a bygone era.

This evening, we took a Coco-taxi over to Seba's house in the Vedado. The three of us squeezed into a yellow fiberglass construction open in the front, round like a coconut over our heads and mounted on a three-wheeled motorcycle driven by a young Cubana who coolly navigated among huge, belching vehicles along the Malecon.

Beryl: Yami and a neighbor were watching soap operas on TV. The apartment was decorated with Disney characters and stuffed animals. Seba is still working on remodeling the place, putting in walls and redesigning. He has done a lot of work. The front room is the only presentable space right now.

We took a taxi to Chinatown and walked around looking for a cheap restaurant. We ended up in a very noisy place, up some steep stairs, with large servings of tasty food that had a vague resemblance to Chinese food and waiter who were clearly not Chinese.

Museo de la Revolucion

Thursday, August 8, 2002

Beryl: Mario wanted a break from looking at art, so we spent our morning and early afternoon at the Museo de la Revolucion. There, we looked at photos and memorabilia with text about Cuban history from the time of Columbus up to July 26, 1959. I was fascinated by the way in which the Cuban revolutionary movement began in 1868 with a revolt against Spanish occupation, continued on through the Spanish American War and on into a communist trend in the twentieth century. It corresponded with movements in Russia and throughout the world. The history was well illustrated with photos, letter, poems, clothing, weapons and other vestiges of revolutionary heroes. It showed the overthrow of presidents like Machado and the emergence of Batista in Cuban politics as early as 1933. Batista (El Golpe) didn't take office until 1953. The labor movement, agricultural movement and women's movement were all precursors of the later Cuban revolution in the 1950's.

Anthony: Fidel emerged in this context as one of many in a broad movement. He was at first on the periphery, notable for his courage and eloquence. After the failed attack on the Moncada barracks and

his return to the Sierra Maestra on the Granma, his genius for leadership and strategy became apparent. The thought of the endless catalogue of brilliant young men and women, who died in this protracted struggle, often by torture, overwhelmed me so that when we reached the last room (a tribute to Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara) I was in tears.

Behind the extravagant Presidential Palace that houses this museum, there is an outdoor memorial to the Granma and other large instruments and trophies of the revolution. This includes the flame-throwing tank improvised by workers for Fidel's guerrillas out of a tractor. To us, the most relevant artifact was the tail of the U.S. bomber shot down over the Bay of Pigs. The remains of the pilot rested in Cuba for nineteen years because in requesting the return, the U.S. would have had to acknowledge collusion with the invaders.

This evening when we got back to the flat, Amalia, unaware of our visit to the Museum of the Revolution, approached me with the gift of a Che Guevara one Peso coin for Mario. She spoke passionately of her admiration for Che and said that she knew personally of his generosity and incorruptibility. She told me that she was present at a dinner one night when a truck arrived to deliver food to Che and other high functionaries. He was delighted with the food and asked if it was being distributed throughout Havana. On learning that it was delivered only to the leadership, he grew angry and hit the table with his fist. "From now on, we eat the same as everyone else!" he ordered.

PRADO 20

I worked on a painting of the view looking down the Prado from our seventh story balcony while the afternoon light illuminated the dome of the Capitol, Casa Bacardi, the Hotel Sevilla and numerous crumbling colonial buildings that the government is slowly renovating. As I painted, I observed inside the constant coming and going of the sisters' friends and travelers seeking accommodations as well as the old man who delivers fruit and another who has been trying to fix the air conditioner in Mario's room. The first night Mario woke up at eleven PM to discover this man in his room apologetically struggling with the intransigent fifty-year-old machine!

Margot and Amalia live wedged in small rooms. Margot uses their second shower as a clothes closet. The best rooms are reserved for the constant flow of guests and for an old woman of eighty-six whom they look after. We were not aware of her existence until today because she is confined to her room when guests are here because she is 'difficult.'

Casa Wilfredo Lam, Museo Colonial, Julio Cesar Pena at Taller (studio) de Artesenias

Friday, August 9, 2002

Beryl: We made an enormous leap with the art study activities listed on our itinerary for the Center for Cuban Studies. After our usual breakfast, here at Prado 20 and a long morning chat with Margot, we walked in the direction of the Cathedral stopping at Hotel Sevilla for bus information on our trip to Vinales. We visited the Casa Wilfredo Lam to view an exhibition of his etchings and lithographs as well as an interesting metaphysical show by contemporary Cuban artist, Carlos Esteban. White line drawings of marionette style figures on black mounted paper.

Anthony: The Colonial Museum, facing the Cathedral, is a spacious colonial building reminiscent of many in Mexico. The exterior walls of this and adjacent buildings are Naples yellow. The interior walls

are white, the windows, doors and ceilings are a cerulean blue. The arches at the top of the tall shuttered windows are stained glass in bright, simple geometric patterns. The entire effect is one of tasteful refinement.

The collection in this museum, primarily from the nineteenth century, revealed a decadent affluence. There was elegant, finely wrought furniture, saccharine porcelains of buxom women and fans of the most incredible workmanship: finely painted with Romantic motifs. The handles were delicately carved mother of pearl overlaid with fold leaf filigree.

Beryl: The last stop was the Taller de Artesenias. We didn't relate to many of the prints on display but were struck by one with skeletons and a kind of 'dia de los muertos' feeling. The same artist had created a larger cut out 'calavera' hanging on a separate wall. We met the artist, Julio Cesar Pena, who then posed comically with his cut out skeleton. We struck up a conversation and really hit it off. He gave us some fliers, his card and a print. He had been in a show in Japan and he gave us that brochure. Mario and I later returned with 'regalos' for him. He was quite glad to see us again.

Barrio Chino

1:30 AM, Sunday, August 11, 2002,

Beryl: This is our final night at Prado 20 before going to Vinales. We just returned from a long dinner in Chinatown with the whole Landau-Serrano-Holdsworth clan and Yamile's parents, brother and two friends.

Anthony: The night is black as pitch and lit sporadically by solitary street lamps. Above us, between the buildings, are flashes of distant lightening. Rank, sour smell of broken sewer lines fills the air. There are beggars, offers of cigars and dark-skinned 'Jiniteras' (prostitutes) in groups of two or three who are provocatively dressed. Then, we reach the bright lights of the main street of Barrio Chino. Representatives of every restaurant thrust menus under our noses. The only Chinese waiter visible in any restaurant wears a stereotypical ponytail.

Beryl: We were 15 altogether and we filled a big table at the restaurant. The conversation drifted from Spanish to English, always leaving out people who did not understand. We walked to the Capitolio, said 'goodbye' to Yami's family and proceeded to Prado 20 where we said 'goodbye' to the rest of the group. Nina is clearly exited to be here, staying with her old friend, Huberto, the theatre director.

Plaza de San Francisco, Plaza Vieja and Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales

We went to the oldest part of Havana this morning walking along the Malacon to Plaza San Francisco. Inside the religious museum/church, we discovered a tower to climb where we could see the view and take photographs. We visited another gallery (Centro de Desarrollo de Artes Visuales) with mostly bad conceptual art and a couple of Carlos Esteva's drawings.

We ate in a horrible restaurant that took forever, served us bad food and then ripped us off. Mario raced home to meet Nina and her friend, Huberto. When they arrived, they admired our paintings and went off to a reception for a rap festival. Huberto offered Mario private acting lessons after testing him in theatre. Mario wants to start immediately after we return from Vinales. Seems like too much pressure to me. We have to get up at the crack of dawn tomorrow.

Vinales

10:30PM, Sunday, August 11, 2002;

Beryl: I'm almost too tired to write. It has been quite a day. We left Prado 20 at 7:30 AM for the bus station to catch a Viasol bus to Vinales. We had hired Huberto's chauffeur, Wilbur, to drive us. Once at the station we were told, it was the wrong station but they would put us in a taxi instead. We left an hour early and were driven by a woman taxista named Maria. A young German woman traveling to Vinales also accompanied us.

Anthony: At the Hotel de los Jasmines, we gazed at one of the most spectacular views that we had ever seen. The Hotel is situated on high ground facing a valley filled with small fields of 'malanga' (a sweet starchy root) corn inter-planted with melons, pineapple and the famous tobacco used in Monte Cristo cigars. The far side of the valley is enclosed by undulating mountains. Within the valley itself, there are steep formations like giant cupcakes rising precipitously several hundred feet from the surrounding fields. Known as 'mogotes', these limestone formations are covered with vegetation except on the most sheer cliffs. It is a landscape from a different time and place.

Beryl: We checked into the hotel and ate a horrible lunch in the restaurant. We decided to walk to Vinales that turned out to be a long trek of a least 3 km on the highway. We met our German friend from the taxi heading towards Los Jasmines on a rental bike. She reported that Vinales was pretty but nothing special and that her room in a casa particular was tiny and claustrophobic. We walked through town, seeing relatively affluent houses, some run-down bars, restaurants and many 'casas particulares'. I was hot, tired and dying for a swim in our pool. All I wanted was to take a cab back to the hotel. However, Anthony and Mario insisted on plodding on along a side street.

Anthony: People leaned out windows and relaxed on their porches. A skinny, black and white dog with notches in both his ears adopted us. As the road became a dirt track, we fell in with an old woman who asked us if we were planning to climb the mountains. This seemed like a good idea so we said 'yes'. She invited us to accompany her to her home located on the trail into the mountains.

Her small house of thatch and tile sits on a red hillock surrounded by a barn and a huge A-frame structure for curing tobacco. She showed us into a small, bare room with a dirt floor.

Beryl: Her daughter, Clara, who appeared to be in her 40's immediately, filled the table with tobacco leaves. She separated out the leaves with holes and the stems and began rolling cigars.

Anthony smoked a little of the first one and said it tasted good. The other two cigars were given to us as 'regalos'. She and two of the sons then lead us through fields of 'malanga' to the nearest mountain and we began to climb. It was steep and our Tevas were hardly the proper shoes to be wearing. Somehow, we ascended fairly high. The view of Vinales and the valley were spectacular from the mountain ledge. It was starting to rain and we were tired so we decided to head back down. The dog, which was stuck further down the mountain, was so excited to see us return that he lost his footing and somersaulted part way down the slope.

We returned through the same muddy fields to the woman's house where she served us three fresh coconuts cut from her tree. En route to the mountain, we had been given some 'guayabas' from a tree.

The woman asked if we would like to see the nearby caves, 'cuervos', so off we went tromping through more fields and red clay, up some very steep steps to a long cave in the mountain. It was already getting slightly dark and the cave was pitch black in the center. We walked through taking short careful steps

until we could see the light at the other end where it opened into a different valley. Caves like this were used during the revolution to store weapons and as hideouts.

Cayo Julias

Monday, August 12, 2002

Anthony: Today, the hotel found a taxi driven by 'Paco' for us. He is a charming entrepreneur whose refrain was 'con Paco todo es posible'. He drove us to Cayo Jutias--a beach that Cubans frequent in the hundreds on weekends. It was quiet on a Monday with just a few dozen Europeans.

Beryl: Here we are looking a beautiful, clear turquoise water, blue skies, palm trees and white sands—quite a departure from northern California beaches. Anthony and Mario went snorkeling out at the coral reefs and saw a large lobster and colorful fish. I swam about half a mile, did a watercolor and worked on my tan. We ate another awful lunch at the beach restaurant.

Anthony: On the winding mountain road to Cayo Jutias, Paco pointed to a dead palm tree and explained that it was hit by lightning. We had been wondering about all the frondless trunks that we had observed on the island. Mario recalled a National Geographic map that we had looked at recently that indicated Cuba and Equatorial Africa as areas of the most frequent electrical storms. Paco nodded and told us that lots of people and animals die each year from lightning.

The food at this hotel is appallingly bad. Apparently, there is no motivation in these state-run operations since everyone is paid in pesos that are essentially worthless. Even the fruit is terrible here which is quite amazing as this valley is a cornucopia.

Cuba is expensive until you learn the ropes. The system is set up to siphon off tourist dollars and redistribute the wealth among everyone. However, the dual economy, in which Cubans generally use pesos and tourists are supposed to only use dollars, is flawed. Some food items and most clothing and consumer goods are only available in dollars. Cubans are desperate for dollars. Many will bend over backwards to get them and use every trick in the book. We have witnessed a few including stealing.

Return to Havana

Tuesday, August 13, 2002

This morning, I sat on our balcony. As morning shadows receded, I listened to the clear voices of 'guajiros' shouting verbal commands to their teams of oxen as they plowed the brilliant red soil. Beryl and I both set up and worked on watercolors of the valley.

Beryl: At 1:00 PM, we packed and waited in front of the hotel for Wilbur, Huberto's driver, to pick us up. By 2:00 PM, we started to worry that Wilbur was not coming.

Mario went looking for a cab. On the way, he ran into Pinky whom we had met on our walk the first day. He told Mario that he had made dinner for us last night and wondered where we were. It was odd, because we had never called to confirm that we would eat there. It was also sad and embarrassing because Pinky is such a sweet guy. This whole incident indicates how desperate Cuban's are for dollars. Just when Mario was completely panicked, Wilbur arrived along with Huberto.

Anthony: They had gotten lost, taken a mountainous route and turned a two-hour drive into a three and a half hour marathon. They were almost out of fuel so I sprung for \$11 for gas. Huberto is enthusiastic about Mario's abilities and is intent on coaching him for a scene in colloquial Cuban Spanish to be performed the day we leave for Santiago. He also wants to arrange for him to study here in Cuba on a scholarship he finished after high school. He says the acting school is one of the best in the world--it would only cost \$2,000 a year. Besides, he added, both of Mario's cousins studied in Cuba.

Nearing Havana, we passed under a number of overpass bridges floating above the highway without ramps or roads attached to them. The only function that they serve is to provide shade for crowds of Cubans whose one means of travel is hitchhiking largely in government vehicles. Huberto told us that these bridges were among the projects abandoned after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Entering the heat, humidity and stink of the refineries that are belching sulfurous filth all over the city, we fondly recalled the clean air of Vinales. I wonder how much of the damage to Havana's collapsing colonial buildings is the result of all this sulfur dioxide mixing with the moist salt air.

On the Malecon near Hotel Deuville

Wednesday, August 14, 2002

I started painting a view west down the Malecon. A group of street urchins, seven to ten years old gathered around me. While I was laying out my design, I pretended not to speak any Spanish and ignored them. A policeman hovered on the periphery. There is a policeman on nearly every block in old Havana. The kids are real tough. They scuffled, fist fought and threw stones at one another. The officer pretty much ignored their quarrels. Finally, a street cleaner with a broom and small wagon who had stopped to watch me admonished them that I was trying to work and they retreated across the street.

A tall black man hung around for a long time. I noticed that he was holding a small canvas. It turned out that he is a painter. He wanted to know what colors I used and was very surprised to learn that I painted with black, which he never uses. He showed me his painting. It was a primitivist portrait of a woman in a tropical landscape.

Thursday, August 15, 2002

This morning, I finished my view down the Malecon. The painter from yesterday, Enrique Barcelona Perez, returned this morning with a gift of a drawing. I asked him if he would pose for me for a few minutes in the colonnade. Afterwards, I passed two dollars to him when I shook his hand. I also got his address so that I can send him a reproduction of the painting. We talked while I worked. He told me that it was his birthday today. He was forty years old. He said that he is a professor of mathematics but that his first love has always been painting.

Casa de las Americas

In the afternoon, Beryl and I took a taxi to Casa de las Americas in the Vedado. The foyer has a mural by Matta created in 1963. It's really good! The reception area contains an exceptional small collection of Robert Matta, Alejandro Obregon and Francesco Toledo. We couldn't wait to see the galleries. Therefore, we were crushed to learn that they were closed because the staff was on vacation.

Museo de Bellas Artes-Cuban Collection (Second Visit) Julio Cesar and Rafael Zarza

We took a taxi to La Plaza de la Revolution and continued our tour of the Bellas Artes Cuban Collection, which is stunning. Picasso, Dali and, to a lesser extent, Miro are echoed in many works but Cuban painting is far from derivative. There were so many interesting pieces that I purchased the catalogue on the way out.

Passing the museum café, we were spotted by Julio Cesar Pena who was drinking beer with four companions. One member of his group turned out to be Rafael Zarza whose work I had admired in the collection. I asked each of them to write their names and addresses in my book. As a group of Latin artists in possession of pen and paper, they turned several pages into 'pequenas obras'! The other artists were Alexis Parra, Max D.C. and Pedro L Redongt. Julio Cesar bought me a beer. He told me that they worked eight to ten hours a day, five days a week at the 'taller' that is free to all members. About a dozen of them are there every day. About eighty artists avail themselves of the facilities but over the years, hundreds of Cuban artists have passed through.

Hotel Deauville

Friday, August 16, 2002

Beryl rehearsed Mario's lines with him in our thirteenth story room of the Hotel Deauville. Our room is sweltering in the morning despite air conditioning.

Beryl: Mario is enjoying Huberto's class a lot and learning things he would never get at SOTA. It is also helping his Spanish. He will do his presentation Sunday morning. Our flight to Santiago is 5:30 PM.

Anthony: Beside the pool at Hotel Deauville are two Italians drinking beer. Their legs entwined with two extremely black Cubanas. The men are rattling away in Italian. The women are responding in Spanish. After a couple of days at this hotel, it was clear that there was a lot of prostitution going on. Saul observed that in the present crisis, prostitution has become a major source of revenue. "When you see whole plane loads of middle-aged European men arriving in Vadadero, it's obvious what's going on."

Pablo Amanda Fernandez

Later, we purchased some Havana Club rum and gathered at Seba's house with Greg, Christina, Andres and Nicole, who has flown in from Nicaragua and Saul who is just off the plane from Miami. On the way over to poet Pablo Amando Fernandez's in the Miramar district, Saul pointed out that the building where he, Nina, and Beryl had lived in 1960. He also explained that the poorly situated refineries that foul Havana's air were placed here by American companies before the revolution. Cuba now produces about 30% of its own oil from wells located in the ocean near Vadadero. Unfortunately, it is high in sulfur. Much of the balance of Cuba's oil comes from Venezuela, which trades it for Cuban doctors and other skilled services.

Beryl: I had been hearing about Pablo's house for forty years. Now I am finally able to go there and meet his wonderful wife, Maruja. They have an enormous art collection, which covered every inch of the wall space in their beautiful, spacious house. Pablo gave us a tour and described each painting. We ended up in his study, which was overflowing with books in English and Spanish.

Anthony: Beryl discovered some Margaret Atwood books inscribed to Pablo. He showed us his recent work with an introduction by her. He complained that he had been looking all day for a quote from Ezra Pound in a book that he had mislaid. We rummaged with him unsuccessfully. Mario did find a book on spiritualism and Christianity (1903) written by an author whose name Leon Denis is the same as Mario's middle names. This delighted Pablo who does not believe in coincidences.

When we were leaving, he hugged and kissed Mario and I and told us how much he loved us. He declared that he only believed in love--not politics or aesthetics. "Love alone enables one to grow and advance."

Teatro Nacional

We rushed over to the Teatro Nacional with Mario for his rehearsal. On the way, we had to squeeze past the malodorous lion cages. There is one trainer to eight lions that are part of the circus performing in the large theater. Fortunately, the lions were doing what lions do best, sleeping. We passed a group of performers backstage. We caught a glimpse of colorful acrobats performing in the bright lights. Then, we slipped into the smaller theater. Huberto had not arrived so Mario and the young Cuban woman rehearsed their lines. We stayed to observe Huberto directing, arranging them like chess pieces with his booming voice.

The Pre-Nuptial Dinner

Beryl: It is pouring rain with loud thunder and there are no pedestrians on the street to be seen from our 13th story window. We are about to leave for the pre-wedding feast at Yamile's family house in the Lawton district of Havana. The event was planned as an outdoor dinner. Greg's family cannot even leave Vadero because the streets are so flooded. Nina and Marion will be coming here soon to pick us up.

Anthony: The rain had stopped by the time that they joined us at the hotel. Wilbur drove us to Yamile's parents' house. Barrio Lawton consists of simple, time worn, one and two story homes along rutted streets reminiscent of Managua. Wilbur enquired at every corner about their address until I thought that we would never arrive.

We sat on the second story front porch. On our last enquiry, we had encountered an uncle of Seba's who happens to live just down the street. He is a skinny, garrulous, old man who took an instant liking to Mario. Once 'in his cups', he began composing a poem about Mario coming and studying in Cuba and living as his guest in Barrio Lawton.

We talked with two of Saul's friends. He studied nuclear physics in Hungary and his wife studied international relations in Moscow. As well as English, he learned Hungarian. She learned Russian, French, and English. With the close of Cuba's nuclear program, he switched to research in cancer radiation therapy. He finds it satisfying and says that research and development in this area is moving forward in Cuba. She spoke about her time in the Soviet Union, which she did not enjoy at all. She witnessed the hypocrisy and contradictions of the system in collapse. She finished her studies as Gorbachov took power. She expressed the fear that now, in Cuba, they are losing a generation that has grown up knowing nothing but the difficulties of the past eleven years. For them, the revolution represents privation and failure.

We moved through the small, hot and crowded house into the rear patio where we sat on a semi-circle of chairs in the light of a single flood lamp. A large moon hung in the warm night sky behind some dark palms. We drank several toasts with rum and whisky. They were cooking dinner in a tiny kitchen for twenty-five people. When the paella finally arrived, it was superb.

Calle San Lazaro

Saturday, August 17, 2002

I finished my painting on Calle San Lazaro this morning, a little hurriedly. I may need to touch it up at home in the studio. People on the corner were delighted when I began putting them into the painting.

I heard an old man enquiring for the local 'curandera' because he had a headache. A black, who later turned out to be a Christian Evangelist, joked, "Watch out for the Cuban sun. It's too strong. I used to be as white as you!"

As I was finishing my painting, a young woman who had been watching me for some time observed that my colors were slightly impressionistic. We talked and I learned that she was a sculpture student in her last year.

The Wedding at Palacio Matrimonial

At 4:00 PM, we gathered with the rest of the family at the Palacio Matrimonial on the upper Prado. Seba, Yamele and Greg were about a half hour late but it didn't matter because the Palacio was behind the schedule. Ours was the last ceremony.

While we were waiting, I talked with Rudy who is African American. He told me how comfortable he and Stephanie feel here. There is no perceptible 'color line'. He remarked that they are planning to come back for a much longer visit when they can travel the length of the island.

When Greg, Seba and Yamile arrived, Seba, elegantly dressed in a white suit, was sweating profusely. Yamile, in a white bridal gown, was resplendent in these rococo surroundings. We slowly ascended the huge staircase in oppressive heat to the squeaky strains of 'Ave Maria'. An enormous ceremonial space lit by tall windows opened around us. The walls and ceiling were covered with ornate paintings. Coats of arms of all the leading Havana families circled the edge of the high ceiling. A red carpet flanked by dusty plastic floral arrangements reached the length of the space to a desk near the far end of the hall where an official was seated. Behind her, his back facing a huge mirror and fanning himself was a man orchestrating the musical program on a boom box.

Seba and Yamile remained seated for a while then walked the red carpet. They exchanged vows and rings and signed the register in a simple ceremony. Afterwards, the boom-box man began to amp up the music much to Pablo Amando's annoyance. He had just stepped forward to read a poem written for the occasion. The music was silenced. He read an elegant piece that Nina translated afterwards.

Beryl: We took a taxi from there to a discothèque in Miramar. Loud music played the whole time and it was hard to talk. There were drinks served, a little food and then dancing began--first slow dances then salsa. I danced a slow dance with Anthony and a salsa with a young Cuban. I received compliments on my new dress. We went outside a few times to escape the cigarette smoke. It was nice to see various family members a second or third time, although the volume of sound prevented serious conversation.

Flight to Santiago de Cuba

Sunday, August 18, 2002

We are in an ancient Russian twin turbo prop AN24. It's hot and as humid as a sauna. We just flew out of Terminal 1 over a deep green landscape scattered with clusters of houses and bright red fields. We banked and circled over Havana harbor and are now flying east towards Santiago. As on all Cubana flights, a mysterious mist is issuing from the air vents at our feet and over the luggage rack. A flight

attendant moves down the aisle mopping surfaces with a cloth so that the condensation doesn't drip on the passengers.

Santiago de Cuba

Monday, August 19, 2002

Beryl: We are staying at a beautiful 'casa particular' next to the cathedral. For tonight, we are all in one room because the previous guest had a problem with their flight and will be leaving in the morning.

Mario's performance this morning was excellent. Huberto went on about his talent and how much he would love to have him study at theatre school in Havana. Nina, Saul, Pablo and Wilbur attended the 'examen' and were all impressed. Afterwards, we went over to the other theatre to watch Cubacircus. The performers were all of the highest caliber and training.

Tuesday, August 20, 2002

Anthony: Last night, we had dinner in the cafeteria of Hotel Casa Grande, which is just across the street from our lodgings. The cafeteria occupies a spacious loggia overlooking the park in front of the cathedral. A fine Afro-Cuban band started playing while we ate one of the better meals that we have had in Cuba—albeit meager and overpriced.

My walk this morning revealed a town, outside the tourist center that is picturesque with sweeping views down to a surprisingly industrial bay. It appears appallingly impoverished. There is an edge of hardship that was less visible in Havana. Every other stranger is out to hustle you generally beginning with a loud 'Amigo!'

When Mario went out alone today, a young man begging him for a sweatshirt approached him. He explained that all the clothing in the stores is in dollars making them unavailable to him. Another fellow offered him rum and a cigar for a dollar courtesy of friends who steal from their factories.

UNEAC

Around noon, we went to the UNEAC (The artists' and writers' union) where we met the curator Blanca Pasin Alarcon. The main exhibition was primitivist work by Luis Enrique Arias and Roberto Torres Lamada. Our favorite work in the whole place was a surrealist sculpture by Wilfredo Fernandez titled 'El Pescador' that incorporated dried fish tails and heads, apparently a reference to the current time of hunger in Santiago. I also enjoyed a couple of cityscapes by Miguel Botalin.

Blanca invited us to hold an exhibition in the gallery next year and offered to introduce us to Reynaldo Pagan, one of the painters who will be showing in Oakland in November this year.

This afternoon, I set up to paint on one side of the market where I had an overview of run-down colonial homes, tin roofs, wharfs, cranes and large freighters in a strip of bay. Beyond the water, hung the dark Sierra Maestra under a clouded sky. Almost immediately, I attracted an enormous crowd that grew restive when I struggled for a long time with the murky strip of sky. One man left, complaining, "He works for half an hour and does nothing."

Reynaldo Pagan and Museo Bacardi

Tuesday, August 20, 2002

We met for an hour with Pagan who presented us with two local publications that featured his work. He offered to take us around to some artists' 'tallers' tomorrow afternoon. Afterwards, we visited the Museo Bacardi that had some interesting paintings.

In the historical section, there was a neoclassical painting of a Mestiza by Joaquin Cuadras, a careened ship in a landscape by Baldomero Guevara and an ambitious depiction of daily life by Jose Joaquin Tejada Revilla along with some excellent small landscapes by the same artist.

One of the best contemporary works was an abstract sculpture by Guariorex Gerrer Estiv. There was also a beautiful cityscape woodcut by Jose Julian Aguilero. Several early modernists were represented by one work each (Victor Manuel, Carlos Enriquez, Marcelo Pogolotti and Rene Portocarrero) all exceptional artists.

The guide, Iraida Puente has a passion for art. She went out of her way to inform us when she discovered that we were both artists.

Barrio Tivoli

Wednesday, August 21, 2002

I started my second painting several blocks southeast of the historic center beyond the Escaleras de Padre Pico in the Tivoli district. There are several spectacular views here. I picked the simplest because I am afraid of getting bogged down. The ramshackle housing high up on the right leads by steep steps down to a street that plunges towards the bay. On the left stands a lovely, red-flowered framboyan tree. A freighter is moored in the distant slice of the bay.

I was immediately surrounded by kids, much better behaved than their counterparts in Havana. A handsome Rastafarian came down from the house above the steps. He was delighted to learn that I was from Oakland because he was interested in the Black Panthers. He invited me in for coffee but I demurred until tomorrow because it was nearly time for me to leave.

Jose Horruitiner and Eddy Ochoa Guzman

Beryl: This was our best day so far in Santiago. Anthony went off painting after breakfast and I started another view from the balcony. When Anthony returned, we needed to leave to meet the artist, Pagan so I didn't have time to finish my watercolor. Pagan took us to visit two artists who live nearby. En route to the first one, Jose Horruitiner, it started to pour rain and we had to wait under an overhang until it subsided.

Horruitiner is a man in his late seventies living with his wife who is a composer and poet in a house blanketed with art, knickknacks and odd curiosities. He served us drinks and showed us the many paintings on the walls. Then, he took us upstairs to a tiny studio with more work. He played a record while pulling out assorted acrylic paintings. His ten-year old granddaughter joined us for the entire time. She entertained us by playing several pieces on the piano including Fur Elise by Beethoven. His wife read one of her poems. Pagan will be illustrating her next book of poetry. Horruitiner is an adorable, likeable person who demonstrated extreme hospitality.

Once the rain subsided, we headed down the street to the next artist, Eddy Guzman. Eddy's work was very competent. He is a realist, bordering on surrealist. Most of his paintings contain trees with rays of light beaming through in unexpected places.

Anthony: Eddy told me how much he admired my painting, 'Desde las Calles Abajo' that the City of Oakland had given to Santiago. He also admired Beryl's slides of her works as he studied them carefully. His son, Eddy, is a perceptive viewer. He made a number of interesting observations and started talking in perfect English. We learned that he had taught himself English from textbooks! He took a liking to Mario and they made a date to get together tomorrow at eleven.

Both father and son are good looking and amusing. Eddy, Sr. has a clear understanding of his art and its place in the contemporary world.

Barrio Tivoli

Thursday, August 22, 2002

I feel very comfortable in Barrio Tivoli away from the center of town. I was joined by my new Rastafarian friend who lent me a pair of powerful binoculars to examine the bay. His girlfriend brought me a demitasse of sweet espresso.

He told me that his two passions are painting and poetry. Whenever he needs money in Havana, he paints pictures. A backup source of income is his necklaces. He told me that he used to like to smoke a joint first thing in the morning followed by a cup of strong Cuban coffee. Then, he would paint and string beads for hours. His friends would ask him where he found the patience. He considered it a better activity than running in the streets and fighting. I observed that there are thousands of people in the U.S. in jail for dealing or using marijuana. He said it was the same in Cuba. He had spent six months in jail for smoking. I put his grandmother in my painting as she stood on their balcony.

Playa Agudore, Rock Sculptures by Juan Adriano Marquez Perez

This afternoon, we contracted with a driver to take us to a nearby beach with coral reefs where Mario and I could snorkel while Beryl swam. We set out in a barely functional early fifties Dodge. Our driver, like most in Santiago, turned off the engine downhill to save gas. He relied more on this horn than his brakes to avoid collisions.

Playa Agudore is a small settlement of shacks scattered among huge red boulders, palms, 'uva' trees with leaves like round, green saucers and other shrubbery. The surf was alarmingly high when we arrived and the inner lagoon where local children and adults were paddling was too shallow for snorkeling. Our driver told us that he would take us to a larger lagoon after lunch. He went off to organize our meal while we baked under a blistering sun.

We were finally invited to wait for our meal under a conical shelter among locals who were drinking beer. The food arrived. Three open jawed 'pargo', a colorful red fish, stared up at us from an array of fried platanos, 'moros y christianos' (mixed rice and beans) and delicious tomatoes and cucumber. Several expectant dogs hovered around us at a discreet distance. The dogs are generally small and polite in Cuba, very different from Mexico!

We set out along the shoreline that was scattered with enormous red boulders. These boulders must have rolled down from the mountains ages ago judging from the trees on top of them. Our driver was accompanied by two young guides who had appeared from nowhere.

Beryl: The walk was interesting. We saw land crabs, hermit crabs, big waves crashing and an iguana.

The problem was it started raining hard. Titi and I waited in a cave while Anthony, Mario and the two men went into the water. I told them that they wouldn't see anything but they went anyway. They swam a ways and then turned back. We waited together until the rain stopped.

Anthony: Our driver joked that we could take photos of them and tell our friends that we had visited indigenous natives in Cuba. Then, one of our guides remarked that two planes had crashed near here. "What airline?" I asked. "Cubana." "Their planes should be in a museum." The other commented. "One went down in the ocean with twenty-four tourists. Nothing was found. Not even an arm or leg." "The waters are swarming with sharks." His friend observed. We laughed nervously thinking that we are due to fly Cubana twice in the next few days.

Returning, one of the men caught a large blue-green land crab. Somewhat later, he caught an orange one that they joked was a Russian crab. They took us along the shore to some huge rocks that have been carved into bas-relief nude women, skulls and strange monsters by local sculptor, Juan Adriano Marquez Perez. They are excellent carvings. They are so completely at home among the other boulders that they seem as if they have been on this shore forever.

Barrio Tivoli

Thursday, August 23, 2002

We are back in Barrio Tivoli for a few last touches to my view with the framboyan tree. A man sweeps the street with a large bristle broom. People with buckets loudly hawk avocados and jucca. "La yucca! La yucca! Caliente la buena yucca!"

Men and women hurry off to work, some with briefcases from shacks so rundown they would be condemned in Oakland (California). A man pulls his vintage motorcycle with sidecar up against the curb below the embankment where I am standing. He takes out a bucket of yellow paint and a brush and begins retouching his vehicle. My Rastafarian friend descends from his home with another brush and lends a hand. After they have finished, the man's wife, with a small child in her arms comes out. She gingerly climbs into the sidecar avoiding contact with all the wet paint. They coast off down the hill towards the bay.

My friend brings me a cup of coffee. The kids gather around. One of them throws a stone at another across the street. He is gently reprimanded by adults who are watching from their balconies. A skinny, old man with a hawk-like face stops and asks me where I am from. He brightens when I say the U.S. and breaks into impeccable English. I ask him how he learned to speak English so well. "In the streets, I was a guide for American sailors. I showed them where to drink and find a good fuck. I was a boy then. Now, I am an old man."

I move up onto my friends' balcony. The three young women who had been staying as his guest all kiss him good-bye and exhort me to paint him "el mas feo", the ugliest man in the neighborhood.

Taller Luis Diaz O

This afternoon, Pagan took us out to the taller 'Luis Diaz O.' in the Vista Alegre district. The administrator Idalmnis Reyes Dominguez explained that this was a hybrid organization, principally a series of small studios for more than twenty painters, sculptors, ceramicists and printmakers as well as a small gallery and cultural center. Pagan who does not have a space here avails himself of the printmaking studio.

It is surprising how many museums, galleries and artists' organizations there are in this town. UNEAC even publishes a couple of quality art magazines.

**Jorge Knight, Israel Tamayo Zamora, Miguel Lobaina B., Jose Montero Hernandez and
Mauricio Reyes Aranda**

The studios in the taller are small cubicles---maybe ten by ten feet in size. The first painter that we talk to is Jorge Knight. He has occupied his space since 1997. It is overflowing with his work. I especially liked the prints and ceramics of Israel Tamayo Zamora and the huge prints by Miguel Lobaina B. We walked through an attractive sculpture garden into the large, bright sculpture studio where they create works in wood, clay and welded metal. Jose Montero Hernandez, the head of the department indicated a huge bath in which they create metal sculptures. The form is finished in wax. Then, it is coated with graphite that conducts electricity and acts as a pole in an electrolytic plating process. With sufficient time, they can achieve any thickness that they desire.

The last artist that we visited was Mauricio Reyes Aranda. He had a painting with three oars attached (oars are a common symbol among these landlocked artists where most Cubans have not left the island in forty years). On one oar, there hung a dead black bird; another had stars and stripes collaged with a rattlesnake skin. Glued to the third oar were newspaper clippings alluding to Elian Gonzalez and in the dark sea of the painting drifted a little paper-hat boat.

I don't think that the art here can be understood completely in terms of Northern European or North American traditions. It intersects, especially during early modernism. However, it runs on a different axis. In this very traditional society with a strong sense of family and a deep undercurrent of Catholicism and Santaria, the artists share an enormous number of common symbols, a common language of Mediterranean, African and mainland indigenous images. These percolate in their unconscious and give rise to startling juxtapositions that we identify as surrealistic, but which represent a tangible reality to these artists.

The Birthday Party

Friday, August 24, 2002

Last night, Mario went to young Eddy's Ochoa's birthday party. Eddy's friends are fellow intellectuals. They spent a lot of time planning a private symposium. They also played "Dictionary". One would pick a difficult word out of a large Spanish dictionary and then they would all have to write their definition on a slip of paper. Definitions were read amid much laughter and a steady flow of rum. Some of them walked Mario home around 1 AM. This last fact we learned from our host, Norma, long before he woke up. Apparently, there is no detail that goes unnoticed in this neighborhood.

Casa de Don Antonio Velasquez

While Mario was sleeping, Beryl and I visited the Casa of Don Antonio Velasquez, the first governor of Santiago. For some time, Santiago was the most important port in Cuba until Havana succeeded it. Hernan Cortez sailed from here on his conquest of Mexico. Don Antonio's home is reputedly the oldest house in Cuba. It sits in one corner of Parque Cespedes. It looks grim and out of place in this square which is otherwise surrounded by twentieth century buildings. The interior with its spacious rooms, ornately carved beams, wooden lattice, and screened windows was a surprise. There is a superb collection of furniture—some from the sixteenth century. It is arranged naturally in the rooms. There is a severe contemporary portrait of the conquistador, Pizzaro, which reminded us of the obsessive men

who once moved through these rooms. In a far corner of the house stand the remnants of the furnace where the gold gathered from all over the Americas was melted into ingots for shipment to Spain.

Gran Piedra

Beryl: Anthony hired Clyde Hensley's driver, Jorge, a taxi driver, to take us to the Gran Piedra. It is a nearly mile high lookout on top of a huge boulder on one of the taller peaks in the Sierra Maestra. We left right after lunch at Don Antonio's restaurant in Plaza Dolores where we have eaten three times. Today, they were out of water. Once outside of Santiago, the drive was filled with vistas of lush tropical plants and trees. Jorge stopped on the way up to show us coffee plants, mango trees and guyaba trees. When we reached Gran Piedra, it was raining heavily complete with thunder and nearby lightening. We sat in the car and then in the restaurant for a drink until the downpour subsided. We had to pay a dollar each to climb the steps to the top. A tourist, who had gotten soaked in the storm, remarked on his way down "Muy caro para una douche." (A lot of money to take a shower.) It was a steep climb but beautifully tropical. Once at the top, the rain stopped and we were able to photograph the Sierra Maestra. Some other people had brought a portable bar with them. They cracked it open and lit into it at the top of the climb. You are supposed to be able to see Haiti and Jamaca from the outlook but it was still too hazy from the rain to see much. Driving home, we chatted with Jorge in English and Spanish about languages, culture and Clyde. Jorge knows all of the artists that Clyde represents including Pagan.

Anthony: Jorge speaks English, French, Italian, Russian and "Spanish a little". He was an engineer until ten years ago when his factory that assembled Russian machinery was closed down. He would prefer to still be doing work that challenges his mind.

Casa Catedral

Most of the time that we have been in this casa particular, the husband of our hostess (Norma), has been in the hospital where he caught an influenza virus following a routine surgery. Her cook and helper, Alfredo, has also been out with a bad back. As a result, she has prepared most of our breakfasts and dinners. She turned out to be one of the best cook's that we have encountered in Cuba. It has been a treat eating her meals. As we eat, the fine music from the Casa de Estudiante in the mornings and Casa de Trova in the evenings drifts up through our balcony doorway.

Beryl: I showed my slides to Norma's husband earlier today and he seemed very impressed. He is definitely recovering well from the surgery now. Alfredo likes my work too. Talking to him this afternoon, it was sad to hear his desire to travel to Spain and the acknowledgement that he probably never will. Like everyone else, he talked about his lack of money and the feeling of being trapped.

Fiesta of Santaguera

Saturday, August 25, 2002

Anthony: Last evening, Beryl and I walked out to the fiesta that the city throws each weekend in a different district. Mario, who had gone on ahead with Eddy, described it this morning as the biggest party that he had ever seen.

Beryl: It was one of the most intense experiences yet in Cuba. The streets were utterly packed with mostly young people strolling, some eating, drinking and dancing or sitting at outdoor restaurants and bars. Whole pigs were roasting on spits. Bands played everywhere and a lot of people seemed drunk.

Various amusement park activities were set up for children. We were amazed to see a cart full of children pulled by a goat. At one point, the crowd got so dense and claustrophobic that we had to turn back. People were clearly having fun and there were hardly any police like there would be in the U.S.

Last Evening in Havana

Anthony: We are back in Havana for one last night at Prado #20. I am sitting on the balcony enjoying the golden dusk. Realizing just how much this handsome, decrepit city has gotten under my skin. Beryl is finishing a watercolor that she had not completed when we left here two weeks ago. Margot and Amalia hover around Mario talking. We feel as if we have returned to the welcome of a couple of doting aunts.

We observe that it feels as if we were several thousand miles from the United States rather than only ninety. I cannot begin to imagine how different this country would be if it were, indeed, that far away—free of our nation's colossal shadow.