



Your Man in Havana 2000

Emilito Signes

Rev 31 October 2000

1. Background

This report is designed to keep all those descendants of Antonio Lagos and Pepita Besteiro (my generation's "Maina" and "Papa") -- as well as collateral lines, special friends, etc. -- up-to-date on the situation in Cuba as seen from my perspective.

This will be a very different report from the one I wrote last year. Except where noted, however, it does not change any of last year's observations and conclusions. It is different in that I have now fulfilled a goal I set last year of bringing a rugby team to Cuba. Not only were we the first US rugby team to ever play in Cuba, this was the first ever tournament of "sevens rugby," a variety of the game in which I specialize, to take place in Cuba.

The surprise and joy of our players is, I hope, reflected in the report, as is my joy at seeing the family again. By no means is this happiness supposed to indicate that anything is better for the Cubans that live there; I didn't notice this. Furthermore, asked about Cuban - US relations, a US State Department representative said "Worse than they've been since the mid-80s."

I can testify, however, that it **is** possible to have fun in Cuba, with Cubans, even in their current circumstances. All it takes is wearing the proverbial "rose-colored" glasses for extended periods of time.



With the Cuban National Team immediately after our game

Although the tour was validated by the rugby, it was only a small part of what was, for all of us, a profound and unique "life experience."

***Al Dekin** - My reflections of the tour are full of superlatives. Of all the places I've been, all the things I've done in rugby, this is at the top of the list.*

***Mike Skahan** - This was the best trip of my life. A life which I appreciate more each day.*



1999 Visit. When Heide and I visited Cuba last year -- despite everything we thought we knew, it was a shock to see what life was like. I can no longer describe it as well as I did last year in "Your Man in Havana," which I first sent out to family members at the end of May. The author of that piece was not I, it was my heart. To a certain extent, that remains true, but I think I have been able to be a little more objective with this report.

2. Updates from May 31 1999 to August 1 2000

To those that only saw the original May 31 version, later revisions of my story contained the following new information.

Addenda of August 2, 1999. After 13 years of marriage, Maribel gave birth, by Caesarian section, to her first child, an 8 ¼ lb. baby boy, Mario Arturo, at 12:30 PM on July 22, 1999. Everyone is thrilled. [For those of us that remember them, this is the great-grandson of Uncle Mario and Aunt Betty.]



Mario Delgado Collazo at 12 days

Addenda of June 12, 2000. More than a year has passed since our visit, and I am deep in the process of planning a rugby trip to Cuba. Omar Rivera -- conceived in Cuba shortly after the Revolution but born in the US -- will be our tour manager and has secured an official license for our trip from the US Treasury Department. Another Cuban's son, Al Caravelli, will be captain. Although Chukin Chao proved unable to help, José Antonio tracked down perhaps the one person in Cuba who could make the trip happen. His name is Marcel Garrigues. A Frenchman and long-time resident of Cuba, Marcel has welcomed us and is in the process of securing all the necessary permits from his end. As I write, the Cuban team is touring in France; for our sake I pray they all return. I am bathed in excitement by the prospect of this trip.

Partially as a result of this article (written for the US family of the Cubans I visited), I was able to collect several hundred dollars from the US family for their relatives in Cuba. I funneled it through a Lagos relative in Spain who distributed it personally to each family, i.e. the families of Diana, Mercedesita, Miguelito, Alicia and Isabelita. We received letters and emails of effusive thanks from all, who assured that it was used to purchase things we would consider necessities.

Alicia's husband Juan died 3 days before Christmas. Perhaps -- but how perverse to say it -- it was a blessing. Maybe she can have a life. At least a little one.



Juan Borges in the 1980s, before stricken with Parkinson's



During our visit, Alicia told me the history of her mother's brother, Emilio Graciani, who years ago moved from Cuba to Ecuador. Alicia had lost contact with the entire branch of the family, including her goddaughter Alicia Graciani, in the 1980s. I have managed to track them down in Quito (a story in itself!) and meet them in Boston (all their children came to the US to study). Alicia in Cuba and her goddaughter Alicia in Ecuador are now back in touch.



Alicia Graciani from Ecuador (left), Rick & Gloria Signes, Alicia's children Cristina, Roberto, Judy (Alicia is Aunt Dee and Aunt Jo's second cousin)

Despite much work, however, I have found no sign of Simón's sisters or stepmother . . .

Isabelita's mother, now 92, is quite ill and constantly bedridden. Isabelita is suffering, physically, from being the sole caregiver. The last news from José Antonio is that her legs and back have been injured from moving her mother about.

Tragically, José Antonio and Minerva are divorced. Minerva, it seems, could not deal with having to live in the same house with a mother-in-law and a grandmother-in-law. "In the environment in which we live," however, said José Antonio, "that's the way it has to be."

Arturito and Maribel remain proud parents of now 26-pound Mario Arturo, who is doing very well (I spoke with Diana by phone last week to get the news.)



Mario Arturo at 13 months



Simón is Vice President of the Havana B'nai Brith and manages to get letters to us mailed from the US by visiting American Jews.

Elián González's arrival (and imminent departure?) has raised Americans' awareness of Cuba.

Through all these changes, however, one thing remains constant: Fidel Castro reigns supreme.

I anxiously wait to show Cuba off to all my dear rugby friends. I'll be curious to see what they think.

Addenda of August 1, 2000. To Atlantis: Elián is home, and President Clinton seems tempted to reach out to Cuba. We may be very near to improved relations with Cuba. Nevertheless, I hope you have no high expectations of the rugby, of the pitch, of the hotel, or of the ambience. This will not be a tourist's paradise.

Despite this, I hope we can be great ambassadors for our nation and our sport, and that we will be the forerunners of more visits -- rugby and otherwise. This sad nation deserves a life!

3. Organizing the Tour

Rugby in Cuba? I pride myself on leading teams to unknown rugby wildernesses, but it never crossed my mind that they had even heard of rugby in Cuba, let alone played it. I described last year how, with the help of a web site and José Antonio, I managed to come across Chukín Chao and the University of Havana Rugby Club. It was April 27, 1999, and I asked Chukín if they'd be willing to entertain a sevens tournament. He said they'd never played sevens in Cuba, but still -- of course.

When I left Cuba, besides 1001 emotions I felt over the fate of my family, I was determined to inaugurate sevens in Cuba.

José Antonio Suárez. Without José Antonio this tour would have never happened. Not only had he made it possible for me to find rugby on my first trip, he salvaged this effort. Chukín, due to the lack of official status of rugby in Cuba, was unable to get us invited. Somehow, José Antonio tracked down Marcel Garrigues, a Frenchman with responsibility for developing rugby in Cuba.

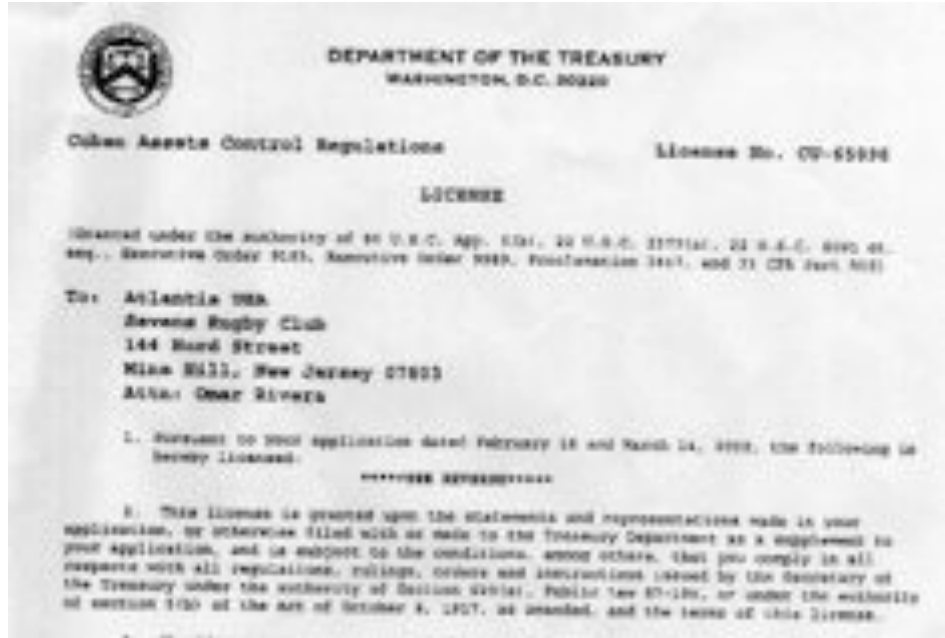
Marcel Garrigues. Marcel was able to do what Chukín could not, and promised not only an invitation but also a tournament. At this point, whether it was just the Cubans and we, or a few more teams, didn't matter to either of us -- the event was on!



Omar Rivera and the Treasury Department. I invited Omar Rivera of the Morris (NJ) Rugby Club to manage the team. I knew Omar would have the motivation to make this happen. "Made in Cuba," as it were, Omar came to the US in his mother's belly and was born in the Bronx. He had never been to Cuba, and jumped at the opportunity.

After erroneously calling the State Department (most people don't realize that's it's not illegal to go to Cuba, just to spend money there -- I bite my tongue and continue), he was sent to the Treasury Department.

It turned out this was exactly the type of group they wanted going to Cuba, and the Treasury Department was a great help in making this visit a successful one.



Treasury Department License to Visit Cuba

Our objective to introduce women's rugby on an "exhibition" basis was nixed by Treasury. Bringing two American teams did not create any interaction. Still determined, we will try for another format where we can pre-arrange some genuine interaction. (I still like my rubias v morenas [blondes v brunettes] idea!)

Al Caravelli. I wanted one more "connected to Cuba person" -- Al Caravelli, whose mother is Cuban. I locked in the 42-year old fitness fanatic, now fully recovered from ACL surgery, as captain.

Picking the Team. I was determined this be a "good guys" team: this was a very personal experience and I wanted a team that, besides excellent rugby players, would comprise human beings sensitive to Cuba's unique situation.

I ended up with a team of ten players, of whom six had, at one time or another, represented the US. At an average age greater than 35, however, it was a bit long in the tooth. Still, I was excited because it was just the guys I needed for this tour. They were from Philly, NY, DC, KC, LA, and even Alaska.

Nonplayers included me as coach, Omar as manager, and Dr. Susan Bercuk (Doc Sue), chiropractor, physiotherapist and EMT (South Park, CO). High-ranking USA Rugby official and referee Dick Elliott (Miami) also joined us.

And oh yes, even though it was a rugby tour, Heide wasn't going to miss this one. She came with the team and held the title of Empress.

Dick Elliott - *"Of the 14 foreign tours I've been on, this tour created the most good will for US relations in foreign countries and rugby relations as well. The players were super gentlemen. As opposed to the 'ugly American,' these players were all beautiful Americans."*

Doc Sue Bercuk - *I feel quite honored to be invited to serve as Team Physician. The gentlemen of Atlantis succeeded as American Rugby Ambassadors to Cuba.*

Al Caravelli - *The team chemistry was one of the best, -- perhaps the best -- of any tour I've ever been on.*



4. The Trip

Nassau. Although there are flights from the US, they are charter flights, only take place twice a week, and are expensive and overall unattractive options. We all met up in Nassau on Tuesday August 29 and left from there. Some of us went early (Heide and I went on Sunday as a belated 35th anniversary celebration) and bopped around Nassau for a day or two. It rained the whole time, but I'll always have the fond memory of my Bahamian breakfast of sardines and grits.



Sardines and Grits: Breakfast in Nassau

Nassau is also the site of our first team photo, fittingly enough, at the Atlantis [Resort Hotel] counter at the Nassau airport. After buying our lunch from home cooked meals out of the trunks of cars in the parking lot, we boarded a Cubana plane for Havana.



Atlantis visits Atlantis



Boarding Cubana; bound for Cuba!



Number Ones. Our "number ones" (formal dress) for the tour are Panama hats and guayaberas. Guayaberas, the fancy Cuban shirts you've probably seen at one time or another, suffice in Cuba as formal attire and are practical (read: cool in the summer heat) as well. Omar's parents not only donated the guayaberas we wore, but his mother died them Atlantis aqua.

In addition they inspired the composition of the first tour tune (to the melody of Guantanamera):

One Guayabera
I'm wearing
One Guayabera
One Guayabera
I'm wearing
One Guayabera



Touring in our guayaberas

We arrived at the brand new José Martí airport terminal, got through immigration and customs quickly, and were met by Marcel Garrigues and Paúl Ruiz Mena.

5. Our Hosts

Hostal ICEMAR. The Hostal ICEMAR (pronounced ees-eh-MAR, run by the Ministry of Education and standing for "Educational Scientific Interchange by the Sea") was perfect for our needs. With room plus three meals a day included for \$29, you'd wonder about the quality of the food, but it was excellent.

The hotel, on Calle 16 in Miramar, has an outdoor pool, restaurant, 24-hour bar, and is about 100 yards from the Straits of Florida and a [sandless] beach.



Hostal ICEMAR



The rooms were fine, but the plumbing left a lot to be desired (if you had no need for a shower and didn't mind the toilet not being flushed until the water truck came, it was perfect). I had tried to prepare the tour party for eventualities like this, and everyone took them in stride.



Unloading the guaguaita and moving in

***Scott Stephens** – “I really missed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, cocoa puffs, and hot showers. It was a small price to pay for an experience like this.”*



Having Lunch Poolside at the ICEMAR

The hotel staff was warm, friendly and helpful. The guys had a lot of fun with the neighborhood kids, who ended up with new baseballs, whiffleballs, bats, etc. For the rest of the week, we never saw one particular kid that he wasn't dribbling his new basketball in front of his house over and over and over again.



Whiffleball: US v Cuba on 16th Street

Of course in the entire neighborhood there was no court, no backboard, no basket, no . . . no nothin'.



The Big and the Little: Paúl and Sue

Paúl currently is the coordinator of the Committee for the Promotion of Cuban Rugby, a French-sponsored organization that falls under the auspices of INDER (the National Institute of Sport).

Paúl Ruiz Mena. Our liaison became a wonderful friend. Paúl, 6'4 - 290, is a 38-year old former world class shot-putter and many-time Cuban national champion. (His Cuban record of 20.28 meters, set in Rostok, stood for 12 years until finally broken this May.) Despite many medals at Pan American and other international competitions, Paúl never competed in the Olympics. In 1984 and 1988, when he made the team, Cuba boycotted. In 1992 he failed to make the team, but qualified for Atlanta in 1996. Unfortunately, he tore his Achilles tendon -- playing rugby.

Cuba, who decries other nations' stealing its athletes for money, has recently recognized all athletes that represented their nation for more than 10 years (such as Paúl). These athletes now receive a pension for life. The amount? 400 pesos (\$20) a month.

You may smile, or wince, whatever – but it's nearly twice the average Cuban salary.



Interviewing Paúl



Giovanni. Marcel had arranged a 24-seat bus ("microbus" or "guaguaita"). Giovanni was the bus driver and he was to be constantly available to take us wherever we wanted to go, day and night (after hours for a few extra bucks, of course).



Team staff with Giovanni and his fiancée

6. Relatives

When we arrived at the hotel, we were pleased to see family waiting for us. Diana and Simón were there, as was José Antonio with his girlfriend Marta. We were able to distribute some of the things we had brought and then the four of them joined the team for our dinner at the hotel.

It was nice having so many people on tour to help us bring things in for family: we would have never been allowed to bring in what we had (in excess of 100 pounds in clothes and medicine) had we been alone. Furthermore, using a couple of teammates as gift-bearers meant we were able to stay under the \$300 in cash that each American is allowed to bring as a gift for Cubans.

It was nice that just about every branch of the family contributed some resources to the effort. Of the US descendants of Antonio and Pepita, there was financial support from members of each branch - Carmen, Manny, Vicky, Dee, Charlie and Jo. Furthermore, descendants of three of Maina's siblings -- Domingo, Emilio and Isabel Besteiro -- also kicked in.



First Night Dinner at ICEMAR. Marta, José Antonio, Diana, Heide, Emil, Simón



I wasn't the only one pleased to be greeted by relatives. After dinner, Omar was surprised by Lucy, a cousin he had never met before. It was very emotional for both of us as we sat in the hotel bar chatting with our relatives.

Omar Rivera - *I didn't expect I would enjoy this trip as much as I have. The people were awesome and the rugby was great. Seeing the family -- my cousin Lucy who I had never met was here to greet me -- was something special. I was overwhelmed by the experience.*

Later in the week, Omar was reunited with his half-brother Arturo, and met his nephew Arturito for the first time.



Omar and his cousin Lucy

Al's. Al's relatives -- a whole bunch of them! -- showed up a day later. I had felt that this whole relative experience was something that Al wouldn't really "get" until it happened, and I was right. But when he got it, it hit him like a hammer, and the same light that shone for me in 1999 shone for him this year.

Al Caravelli - *This trip exceeded all my expectations, anything I could possibly think of. In anticipation of meeting my family (for the first time since I was a year old), I expected to feel a deep depression. But they were so happy to see me that it gave me great joy. Speaking to a cousin of mine, she told me that I just gave each of my aunts & uncles an extra year of life.*



Al (with tank top in front) and less than half of his Cuban family



7. A Visit to the US Interests Section

As a group licensed to visit Cuba, we were invited to a briefing at the US Interests Section (USINT).

Public Affairs Officer Larry Corwin was our host, and his discussion was far ranging and informative. Among many things he told us was that there is NO embargo on food or medicine! According to Corwin, the lack of medicine available to the average Cuban is largely the fault of the Cuban government, who wants to blame the US and the embargo. [Of course it's not that simple; it's my understanding that our regulations make the purchase of medicine quite difficult.]



Atlantis at the US Interests Section: Larry Corwin is 3rd from left

A large number of Cubans work at USINT. Nevertheless they officially work for the Cuban government, which receives payment in dollars and turns around and pays its employees with the same number of pesos, or 5% of what USINT pays the government. [This is the case for all foreign employers; others have related the same story.]

To make sure their employees get a living wage, USINT -- -- as do other foreign employers -- turns around and provides them with a "jaba," a Cuban custom of giving gifts with payments. In the case of USINT, the jaba equals their pay in dollars. Thus to pay them once, we pay them twice.

Larry also defended the government's continuing support for the embargo (how could he not? It is our government's policy and he is a government employee).

I have to put my two cents in. If I try to cut through everything I've ever heard our government say about the embargo, all I can figure out is we're afraid if we drop the embargo with nothing in return Castro will unilaterally declare victory. That seems like misplaced machismo to me. If there is one thing on which **every** Cuban with whom I spoke agrees, it is "End the embargo! We are the ones suffering, not our leaders."

Brian Driscoll - I found the Cuban people's generosity, curiosity, and acceptance of Americans overwhelming, especially considering the obvious hardship they are under. The embargo's gotta go!



8. Habaneros and their life

As much as we enjoy the sights, we are taken even more by the Cuban people. The following quote from Christopher Baker in *The Havana Handbook* reflects our experience: "The Habaneros (residents of Havana) are perhaps the most remarkable part of this remarkable city. The rest of the world could do much worse than see them as role models. It is not simply the noble way they demonstrate how to squeeze pleasure out of adversity. Cubans are so unstintingly generous, so gracious, so full of decent, considerate behavior that they exemplify a more elegantly human way of being."

Baker credits the Revolution: "This 'New Man' is the very essence of the Revolution, . . ." I don't buy that: the Habaneros I knew were just like that in the 50s.



Atlantis and Habaneros: Crashing a Wedding Photo Shoot at the Capitolio

***Keith McLean** - I was surprised most by the positive way people reacted to us being there in Cuba. The people were personable, polite and humble. Even the hustlers were polite.*

Dollars, Pesos and Food. I noted last year, in some detail, just how frighteningly low Cuban salaries are. The Cuban system is designed to prevent the accumulation of wealth. The only ones that come close are those with access to dollars. Economically, it's better to be a bellhop than an engineer; better to be a whore than a doctor.

Although each Cuban receives a ration book each year allowing the purchase of food and other supplies at government-subsidized prices, those items are often not available. Last year my uncle showed me his "libreta," or ration book, which had cooking oil checked off in January, but in no subsequent months: it just hadn't been available. Well, it probably was available, but in dollars, at prices roughly equivalent to those we would pay in the US. An engineer nephew commented to me last year, "See this water glass, it cost 85 cents. That's more than I make in a day."



A page from "la libreta"

I was able to find some actual numbers from a Washington Post web site. It states that the 1999 average salary in Cuba was 221 pesos (or \$10.50 at the current 21:1 rate) per month.

The rationed quantity and pesos per month for food and supplies follows.

Rice; 6 lbs.; 1.50
Sugar; 6 lbs.; 0.75
Legumes (half peas, half beans); 1.5 lbs.; 0.48
Coffee; 0.25 lbs.; 0.80
Eggs; 12; 1.80
Meat; 1 to 2 lbs.; 0.75 to 1.50
Cooking oil; 0.125 lbs.; 0.15
Salt; 1 lb.; 0.10
Fish; 1 to 2 lbs.; 1.00 to 4.00
Laundry soap; 1 bar; 0.20
Bath soap; 1 bar; 0.25
Tooth paste; 1 tube; 0.65 to 1.00

A daily 2.8 oz. of bread per person is subsidized to 0.05 pesos. In addition, there are a couple of items subsidized for children only. Through age 6, 2.1 pints of milk are available daily for 0.50 pesos, and from ages 7 to 13, 6.3 pints of soy yogurt weekly costs 3.00.

Great prices, you say. For example, 6 pounds of rice costs 1.5 pesos (or 7 US cents). Yeah, that's true, but if they don't have it, you must pay American prices of perhaps US\$3 or more for 6 pounds (or more than 40 times the subsidized price). In this case, rice alone would represent 30% of an average Cuban's salary. It's an absolutely bizarre system, and economically, I can't think of it as anything but a dead end.

Last year I wrote that, despite being in the tropics, it was very difficult to find fruit outside the tourist areas. This was based on what I'd read, and I never followed up on it. This year, prior to the games at the tournament, I accompanied Giovanni and Paúl to a market in Miramar. We got 40 bananas at a peso (5 cents) apiece and a huge bag (maybe 50 pounds) of oranges for 50 pesos (\$2.50). There was a lot of produce, in fact, available at this market at similar prices. "Yes," said Arturito, "I suppose that is cheap. But remember, even at those prices, for me one banana costs nearly an hour's pay."

Finally, one last note on the effect of monetary gifts. If someone makes \$10 a month and can afford to live on it, one would think that perhaps they could live twice as well on \$20. That isn't even close to being correct. Housing and utilities in Cuba are pretty much government subsidized. As are "essentials," as noted above. Above and beyond these necessities of life, however, things are priced similarly, or even higher, than in the US. Thus an additional \$10 can give someone a little "breathing room," but no more than that. It is definitely appreciated, but it's not going to make anyone rich.



To quote Miss Clack in *The Moonstone*, "I could write pages of affectionate warning on this one theme, but (alas!) I am not permitted to improve, I am condemned to narrate."

Cubans and the Revolution. Given their very difficult existence, one would think that Cubans would be champing at the bit to get rid of their current government. It doesn't, however, seem to work that way. It's not that most are happy with it, although there is a hard core of supporters of the Revolution. These are people that remember (or remember through parents and grandparents) the corruption of the Batista era and the influence of the Mafia and the lack of education and health benefits to the poor in those days. The Revolution brought some positive changes to Cuba.

Fidel Castro is also a very convincing person, and the embargo has allowed him to divert blame for Cuba's economic problems from his own bankrupt economic system to the US.

As the economic system continues to sputter, the number of unhappy people increases. There is, however, a huge problem for the Cuban people -- a seeming lack of viable alternatives.

Cubans and Cuban Exiles: No Mas Canosa. Despite a genuine disenchantment with their government, Cubans see few viable options. They are certainly not drawn to the politics of the Cuban exiles in the US. Their politics, as embodied by the late exile leader Jorge Mas Canosa, offend Cubans even more than those of their current government. The following reflects a conversation I had with an anti-Castro Cuban:

"The Cubans who left in the 1990s, even in the 1980s, we respect. They still remember what it's like, they know what we have to go through, and they have compassion for us. The Cubans who left in the 1960s, however, are a different story. They resent us, they have no idea what our lives are like. They even refuse to come here, so they'll never know. As bad as things are here, we'd rather stick with what we've got than be subjected to those guys. They should stop calling themselves Cuban and just be content with being North Americans. I have no respect for them."

Cuban Police. Havana has got to be one of the safest places in the world. No matter where you go there are police, and they do assure order. Unfortunately, this safety comes at a price. We see people stopped regularly. Several reasons are given. One is the need to keep prostitutes and hustlers (jineteras & jineteros) off the street. Also -- you're not allowed to live in Havana without the government's permission. Thus if someone from outside the city is "carded," s/he must answer a lot of questions as to why they're there.



Policeman "interviews" Cuban couple at the beach

At the hotels, Cubans are kept from visiting the guestrooms. One of many criticisms of the Batista regime was that it practiced "tourist apartheid." Well, folks, tourist apartheid is alive and well in Castro's Cuba.

Apparently the police do more than just question people. Amnesty International notes several cases of people sent to jail for months merely for criticizing the government in public.



When walking through Old Havana late at night and seeing so many police, it does make me feel good, and safer. Then, knowing all the other things going on, I feel guilty about feeling good.

Mike Coyner - *Its not often that we as Americans stop to appreciate the little things in life like running water, fresh foods, and the Freedom of Speech but if you've ever been to Cuba, you will stop. Imagine if every person in America who publicly questioned or bad-mouthed President Clinton were incarcerated.*

Politics aside, the rugby was good, the cigars were/are great, the beer was cheap, and the people are warm-hearted.

9. Rugby Practices

With the entire Cuba experience swirling around us, we don't forget why we're here. On Wednesday, our first morning in Cuba, we leave for practice at 9 AM.



View from the Field

We practice at the field we are to play on. There are no posts, no lines, and half the field has grass a foot high. Half a dozen people are working on it, though. One is using a lawnmower a foot wide rolling on wheels made of rebar. While running practice, my view across the street is of a long sign stating "Creemos [we believe] en Fidel, en la Revolución, y en el Socialismo."

Thursday we practice again. To use half the field we help the workers move about 30 piles of cuttings.



Piles of grass cuttings we moved to create practice space.

We planned a joint training session Thursday afternoon with the Cubans, but there is a huge thunderstorm and we wait to leave the hotel until it ends. We get to the field and find out the Cubans had left at the start of the storm. I'm willing to call off the practice but the players push to do something. "Something" turns into an intensely competitive session that I abort early in order to save some of that "attitude" for Saturday.

Doc Sue Bercuk: Indefatigable. Doc Sue is an amazing resource, who never ceases to go above and beyond the call of duty. Our aging team was pretty banged up (Stack Stephens' described himself as "falling apart"), but Sue's non-stop ministry kept everyone healthy (no one missed a minute because of injury) and the players were grateful. As were a couple of Cuban players whom she attended during the tournament. Then there was a guy on the street with a broken arm who fell and damaged the sling he was wearing. Sue just happened to have a sling on hand and fixed him up.



Doc Sue works on Tom Brewer before practice

Doc Sue Bercuk -- *I felt so open-hearted and being able to help people was very meaningful.*

10. Rugby in Cuba: A History

History. First played in Cuba in 1992, rugby existed only at the University of Havana until 1998. There are now three teams, with a fourth beginning. All clubs are in Havana, but expansion is planned.

In 1999, INDER recognized rugby only as a recreation and not as an official sport. Rugby's status has improved since then (Chukín was able to invite the Tucson RFC to visit), but still has a long way to go. We have informed INDER of our positive impressions of the tournament, and hope this will help. The inauguration of rugby as an Olympic medal sport will be a huge boost.



Just as we were surprised that they played, many Cuban rugby players were surprised that we play. Now we both know.

While searching for potential women rugby players, we learned Paúl's older daughter plays basketball for Cuba U-19. Although this is not something she's about to give up, Paúl confirmed that she had some athletic friends. Where there's a will there's a way, and we've got to track down a few Cuban women with the will. We can help provide the way.

The beginning: Chukin, Emilito, Ramón and Osvaldo in 1999

Last year I wrote " I've asked Chukín for an invitation . . .The first ever Havana Sevens? Hmmm."

Hmmm indeed.



The French Connection. One reason Cuban rugby has come a long way since the days of one team waiting for tourists to arrive is that they have made a “French Connection” that has formed a "Committee to Promote Cuban Rugby." Marcel Garrigues is the President of this Committee, sponsored by private French enterprises.

The Committee has a relationship with the French Federation of Rugby (FFR), but is not yet official because there is, as yet, no formal connection between Cuba and France with respect to rugby. They are working on that and Marcel is the official FFR representative in Cuba.

Tour of France. Certainly the highlight of Cuban rugby to date has been the national team’s tour of France between June 4 and July 4, 2000, where they went 2-6.

Of course, the French sponsored the entire tour; there is no Cuban government money for rugby. Still, the fact they were allowed to go means something and the INDER representative that made the trip came back with a positive impression.

Unfortunately for future tours, two Cubans decided to stay in France. One was one of Cuban rugby's greatest catches, Reynaldo Quintero Álvarez, a former **World** Junior Champion in the 100-m hurdles. Fortunately for them, Cuban rugby is getting athletes!

That's always a good start.

11. Boys on Tour

Our tour wasn't all rugby nor melancholy reflections. Some of it was flat out fun tourism. We got some bus tours, visited important sites, shopped at markets and walked through Old Havana. We made relaxing visits to cafes with musicians playing traditional Cuban music. Get a drink, smoke a cigar, mellow out. It was this mode that inspired the following from Jim Walier.

***Jim Walier** - Take a sip of a mojito, Hemingway's favorite Cuban rum drink, and imagine the scenario: take a team of veteran rugby personnel to one of the most intriguing places on the globe and turn them loose for a week. It was an awesome rugby tour that included challenging rugby, exposure to the rich Cuban culture and history, pristine beaches, and of course the great cigars.*



With Brian and Mike & enjoying a cigar



One of the areas that I love to visit is the Malecón. In Christopher Baker's guidebook he says, "How many times have I walked the Malecón? Twenty? Thirty? Once is never enough, for Havana's seafront boulevard enigmatically seems to represent all of Havana."

It's unbelievable how so many obviously nice buildings are rapidly decaying along the Malecón. There is now a tremendous influx of Spanish money to restore buildings along this great boulevard, and you can see construction in progress at various spots along its length.

Keith McLean -- *[One] observation was the architecture. Although it was very dilapidated, I could visualize a time when Cuba was a very beautiful place.*

Hopefully in the not too distant future I can see beautiful beaches with refurbished buildings and houses and a great vacation spot when and if the political environment changes. I for one would go back.

All you've heard about 1940s and 1950s cars is correct. The Revolution rejected materialism, and if its goal was to stop making "things," they were certainly successful; the past is all around us.

Warren Weiss -- *I agree with Einstein: time travel is possible. I feel like I went back to the 1950s.*



Al and '55? Chevy, Emil and '53? Chevy

We visited the Capitolio, modeled after the US Capitol. Formerly the Cuban capitol, it is now an office building. While we were there a newly-married couple climbed the steps for some wedding pictures. Omar, being Omar, led us all to the couple where we crashed their wedding picture session.

Although Heide and I didn't attend (we had family to visit), Friday evening the troops took a trip to la Cabaña, the largest fort in the Americas.

Shopping was a staple of the tour, as being here on a special Treasury Department license meant that we were allowed to bring back \$100 in Cuban goods. Cigars, of course, were the number one priority.

Brian Driscoll -- *One observation / question based on our experience: I am guesstimating that at least 6 million of the 11 million population MUST work in one of the cigar factories considering how many people approached us who "had friends who worked in one."*

Through our rugby contacts, we paid \$40 per box for Monte Cristo #2 or equivalent. I hear that's good.



12. Escuela Ignacio Agramonte

September 1 was the first day of school, and we got up at 7 AM to attend the first morning assembly of the new year. Some would have preferred to sleep in, but in the end everyone was glad we'd gone.

We visited Escuela Ignacio Agramonte, a primary school on B Street in Vedado, invited by one of the Cuban national team players, Iván Robert Suárez, a teacher there. Introduced as a rugby team from New York, we were invited to a place of honor on the stage.



Kids at Assembly

Among more routine statements, the assembly included a declaration of communism and loyalty to their leader Fidel Castro. At the end there was a song. The lead singer, a child, sang a verse "And if the Yankees / Want to come here . . ." The next line was drowned out by some laughter from the parents, but whatever she said was accompanied by spraying the audience with an imaginary rifle.

I had really wanted to believe that stuff didn't happen any more.

(Well maybe I'm wrong; they might just be Red Sox fans: we would do that!)



A minute later, she was spraying bullets



Later, one of my relatives comments "If they could, the people that have the children sing those songs would be the first to jump on the next plane to Miami."

After my return home I discovered the name of the song is "Cuba, ¡que linda es Cuba!" [Cuba, How Lovely is Cuba!] written in 1960 by Eduardo Saborit (interestingly, perhaps ironically, the tournament was played in Saborit Stadium). As the result of an Internet search, although I never found the line noted above, I did find the first chorus. Its last line is "Cuba, ¡qué linda es Cuba!/ ahora sin yanquis la quiero mas" [now without Yankees I love her more].



Children Salute Cuban Flag

At the end of the assembly we joined in with the kids for a photo shoot.



**They might like Yankees after all: the kids enjoying a few camera shots.
That's Al's nephew Onil, left rear, videotaping the proceedings**

On the way out, we got a brief tour of some of the classrooms. No class has more than 23 students. As I write, the Boston schoolteachers (my daughter is one) are threatening a strike because the school district plans to increase class size from 28 to 31. From my previous visit, I also know that the Cuban system produces very well educated children.



Kids Volunteering in Class

We also meet the wife of Manuel [last name?], one of the musicians in the extended Buena Vista Social Club clan, who is among the gathering at the school. (She tells us he is touring in Los Angeles.)

***Steve Robke** - Cuba is a country of contradictions. The society is poor, but well educated. The buildings are dilapidated, but the views are breathtaking. The children are shoeless, but seem happy. The government controls everything, yet there is no infrastructure. There are laws, but they need to be broken to survive. To me, Cuba is a prison with paradise potential.*

13. At the Beach

Following the unforgettable Friday morning school visit we spent a couple of hours at Santa María, a fantastic beach east of Havana. Although we had thought of fitting in the world-famous Varadero Beach at some time during our tour, this was just fine. In fact, better: there were even some Cubans here.



Friday morning at Santa María Beach East of Havana

On the way to the beach, we had noticed a large billboard prominently featuring Che Guevara, and it seemed like a perfect photo op. We stopped, donned our guayaberas and Panama hats, and lined up under



the billboard. About a zillion pictures were snapped, and one was to grace the September 29, 2000 issue of **Rugby Magazine** -- all 11x17 inches of it!



Posing with Che East of Havana

Although Santa María was special, it didn't take too much to make for a pleasurable beach experience. We even enjoyed the "beach without sand" 100 meters from our hotel. It's rocky (sandals recommended), but we enjoyed it. Diana says it's a popular beach for Habaneros to visit.



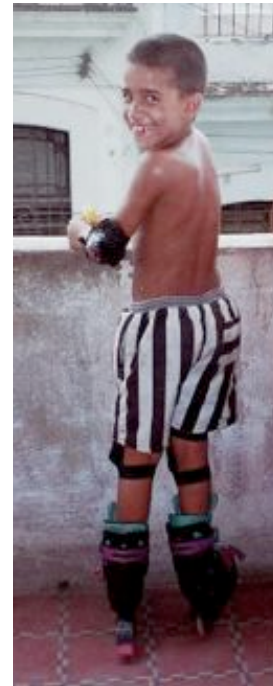
The beach by our hotel

14. Family Visits

During much of time the boys were on tour, Heide and I were visiting family. On Friday, we visited Alicia, Roxana and Jonny. We were lucky to see Roxana, who had just that day arrived from a month in the country where she was doing government service. We were very pleased that we were able to bring Jonny a pair of roller blades, donated by the son of one of Heide's co-workers. He loved them!



Roxana's Certificate



Jonny's new blades

This certificate recognizes Roxana's voluntary contribution of a month of her time to work as a waitress in a rural vacation spot for workers being rewarded for a job well done. According to Roxana and Alicia, it was an honor to be able to volunteer her services in this way.

From there we moved on to Bebo's house, where we saw Arturito and Maribel (and met Mario Arturo for the first time). We had planned to have dinner with the family, but Bebo had been rushed to the hospital suffering from acute appendicitis. It turned out that he was also suffering from a pervasive infection and was in intensive care. As I write this (October), he is still in the hospital recovering.



Mario with "Shape toy" that went through all 4 Signes kids



Heide at Isabelita's house Friday night



At La Mina Friday night with Arturo, Maribel, José Antonio, Marta

Arturito, Maribel and Mario joined us for a visit to Isabelita's house. We had a nice visit but did not see Isabelita's mother, bedridden for several months. Then José Antonio, Marta, Arturito, Maribel and Mario joined us for dinner. But first -- and last -- we visited the two hotels at which José Antonio works. At the first, Santa Isabel, we sipped a mojito and visited one of the luxurious rooms. After dinner we visited la Florida for some music and a nightcap. We didn't leave la Florida until about 2 AM, far later than the curfew the players had set for themselves.

In between we had dinner at La Mina café and listened to the same trio we had enjoyed so much in 1999.



Mario and Maribel at about 2 AM in Hotel Florida lounge



15. The First Havana Sevens: the Games



Atlantis Team at First-Ever Havana Sevens

Saturday, 2 September 2000. The tournament began at 3 PM and was over by 7. The number of fans in the stands was approximately zero, which coincided with the amount of publicity given to the tournament. Al, Omar and I, however, all had relatives there to watch and that pleased us. Among Al's relatives was his 22-year old nephew Onil, who spent several days hanging out with us, and became the tour chronicler, taking control of the Atlantis video camera.

Another relative who really enjoyed herself was my youngest Cuban cousin, 29-year old Roxana, who joined the team for our Saturday and Sunday evening festivities.



At the Tourney: José Antonio in front. Behind are Miguelito, Enrique, Merceditas, tío Miguel Ángel



Steve Robke hauls in a lineout

It's hard to admit, but we're still not sure what the tournament format was; sometimes you just roll with the punches. After first trying to have a say in how it would be conducted, then just trying to find out, we finally said "Just tell us when we're playing at least 10 minutes before kickoff."

Our first game pitted us against Martí, and using a classic sevens game plan, we were able to dispatch them easily by a 40-0 score. They probably had the ball for less than a minute in the entire game. We also made quick work of the University team, the Indios Caribe, 34-0.

The third match was a barnburner. Giraldillos came out determined to take no prisoners, and these players seemed to have learned something from their tour of France: the game was punctuated with hard hits and fists aplenty flying in at tackles, rucks and mauls. I'm pleased to report that all the fists were Cuban, as we stuck to our promise not to play that kind of game.

In the end a last minute try broke open a very exciting game and we won by 19-0. It was a wake up call.



Talking to the team between games

Mike was right. They've got some players!

Instead of playing the tournament final, we were declared champions (no hardware of course), and were given a 20-minute notice that we would be playing the Cuban national team as the final event of the day.

We were told the game would be 7-minute halves, then about 10 seconds before kick off, the ref told us 10 minutes. The first half went nearly 13. It seems he thought they were fitter. At any rate, had we played sevens, the final score would have been 21-12. As it was, we exploded at the end of both halves and won 40-12. Over the course of the day, we outscored the Cubans 21 tries to 2. Our leading try scorer, with 5, was Brian Driscoll. These results didn't come easily; we had to work for them. We played great sevens.

We all noticed how quickly the Cubans modified their game plan as the day went on, a sign of intelligence. By the end of the day they had made some technical corrections to their game simply by observing our play. It was a pleasure to see how quickly they were picking it up.



Keith McLean -- As for rugby, with the proper coaching, facilities and development of players, Cuba would be as strong as they are in international boxing and baseball.

The players walked through the Cuban line and presented them with our jerseys. What had seemed awkward handshakes earlier in the day were more relaxed and there were smiles all around.

I thought simply "We did it!" Not win, but just play . . . the first Havana Sevens was a reality!



Mike Skahan celebrates after Cuba game. The sign in the back reads "Sport . . . Everyone's Job"

Limited Interaction. One purpose of this tour was to interact with the Cuban people, and we certainly did. Nevertheless, interaction with the players themselves was far too limited. Firstly, we never got together Thursday as we had planned. Secondly, after the tournament we were limited to sharing a few cases of beer Omar hurriedly bought. After a brief time everyone dispersed.



Mike Coyner chats with Cuban player after game

One interactive moment we did have time for was when someone asked the Cubans to pick the biggest nose on the team.

Tom Brewer -- No rugby tour would be complete without a few laughs, and this tour was filled with them. One memorable moment was when Stack was voted Biggest Nose by the Cubans.



The only unpleasant incident of the tour took place following the tournament. We all had zillions of things to give away to the Cuban rugby players, and as we began to get them out, the players (and, unfortunately, others) swarmed around us and we were overwhelmed with people taking stuff as fast as we could get them out of our bags. In one case, this resulted in a non-playing hustler getting a pair of cleats. Meanwhile, most of the national team players that had actually competed against us were still cooling down a few yards away. It wasn't pretty. In fact, Jonny's brand new Dallas Cowboy shirt "disappeared" in the confusion.



Jonny with new baseball and Dallas Cowboy shirt that later "disappeared"



Mike trades his Timex for Che

I also heard later that as our players were giving the jerseys to their opposites, one player asked if this could be done later, as in France similarly donated jerseys were taken from them (property of the State, I guess). By that time, though, it was too late. Curiously, no one remembers seeing any of the players with an Atlantis jersey after they reached the stands.

Marcel commented that the best thing was to play the game, have a quick beer and leave.

But we don't want to settle for that. We can do better.



Omar presents Atlantis plaque to captain Alexis Figueras. Chukín Chao is to Omar's right



The small boy has just presented us with a box of cigarillos. In the back, Tom is talking with Ivan, whose school we visited Friday.



Omar meets his nephew Arturito for the first time



Teams having a beer together after game

16. Saturday Night

Following the tournament, a vastly extended group of us -- relatives (mine, Al's Omar's), friends, even a couple of friendly jineteros -- had dinner together in the hotel, after which we headed off to an evening of drinking and dancing at the 12 Apóstoles, a nightclub near Morro Castle and La Cabaña.

Heide and I wanted a last late night stroll through old Havana and Giovanni found us a 1955 Chevy taxi. We got there just before 2. Although most places were shutting down, we found a new bar, "La Dichosa" -- at Obispo and Compostela -- that hadn't been there in 1999. We had a little snack and I tried a canchánchara, a drink which was the specialty of the house: aguardiente, bee's honey, and lemon juice on ice.

We got to the hotel after 3 AM, and were the first to arrive -- by a long shot.



17. Sunday

The team headed off to the beach again. Heide and I had to do our shopping. Besides about 100 postcards, this included a few trinkets here and there bought both in Old Havana and at the market Feria G.

One place we didn't go shopping was Johnson's Pharmacy, which remains open despite its empty shelves. (I think the Cuban government may be trying to make a point.)



The interior of Johnson's Pharmacy

We returned to the hotel and spent a few hours with the postcards. After dinner, Diana and Simón came with the whole family. Not only Arturo, Maribel and Mario, but also Diana's daughter, Diana Isabel, her husband Fernando Henríquez and two of her sons, Fidel [Castro] and Fernando [Henríquez].



Diana Isabel and her husband Fernando Henríquez



Diana Isabel's younger children, Fernando Henríquez and Fidel Castro

We were hoping to join the team for an evening at the Capri Hotel organized by Roxana (\$10 cover for all you can drink), but the pleasant family visit lasted well beyond midnight.

18. Future of the Havana Sevens

The Cubans want to make this an annual event. To attract the European teams they're after, they were speaking about mid to late June as a better date.

They need far, far better organization if this tournament is to fly. We came prepared for a lack of organization, but the people that ran this tournament struggled to deal with 5 teams, let alone more. We can help -- and could have helped this year -- but they seemed uninterested.

There's a long, long way to go, but a huge step has already been taken.



This is what it's all about!



19. Farewell to Cuba

At the airport, we said a fond farewell to Paúl. Heide, who had received a team polo shirt, donated it to him and we were able to take a team picture with Paúl as one of us.



The team -- including Paúl -- at the airport prior to departure

For Omar, Al and me, saying good bye to our families was bittersweet: we all wanted to get home, but we knew how much joy we were giving them and I think all three of us wouldn't have minded staying a few more days to spend more time with them.

At the same time that we brought them joy, I wonder if we also brought them desperation. Both Al and I have relatives that want to get out of Cuba so badly . . . while we're they're, they have hope. But, when we leave? It's hard to know.

I'm also distressed because, during my visit but before I got to see him, my 81-year old tío Bebo suffered acute appendicitis accompanied by serious infection. During the rest of our stay, he remained in intensive care and as I write he is still in serious condition. Thank God I saw him last year! Hopefully I will see him next year as well.

It's been a wonderful week.

Steve Robke - This was the most interesting and unique rugby tour I've ever been on.

Tom Brewer -- I may be echoing others but Cuba was, arguably, my most memorable tour.

Warren Weiss - This was the most unique experience in my life.

Doc Sue Bercuk -- Once again I find myself saying how kind the people are, how stunning the city is, how beautiful the beaches are, how great the food is, how exciting the music and the dancing are. The emotion of this tour cannot be expressed in words.

Al Caravelli - It saddens me, on the one hand, that this may be my last -- certainly nearly my last -- tour as a player. If it is the last, though, what a great way to go out.

Heide Signes -- I am somewhat prejudiced but on this tour Emil outdid himself in putting the team together. All were terrific, sensitive people who adapted to and enjoyed the circumstances and people they found in Cuba. I was proud to be part of the inaugural Havana Sevens tour.

Every life should have at least one experience like this.



**Appendix 1
Photo Gallery**



View from the Hotel: Florida straight ahead



The three "cubanitos"



Three generations of vehicles: 50s Buick, 70s Russian car, and 90s Cuban invention: the "camello"



Hard to tell them apart



At La Mina: Our first Cuban cigar purchase



Al speaking to some Habaneros at La Lluvia de Oro



The stands at Saborit Stadium. Before the Revolution, this was a dog track.



Inside the stadium was a Cuban sports' museum which included both pre-revolutionary (Kid Chocolate was World Jr. Lightweight Champion in the 30s) and post-revolutionary mementos.





A small part of the Saborit ground crew



Keith fields ball at kickoff as Al floods the lane



Iván and Tom



Roxana, Jonny, Marta at hotel after the tournament



The Philadelphia Connection



Appendix 2
Atlantis Statistics -- First Sevens de la Habana

Preliminary results:

Atlantis	40	Univ. de la Habana (Indios Caribe)	0
Atlantis	34	Martí	0
Atlantis	19	Giraldillos	0

Atlantis vs Cuba

Atlantis Roster

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Plays in</u>
Tom Brewer *	35/36	New York City
Al Caravelli	42	New York City
Mike Coyner *	32	Fairbanks, Alaska
Al Dekin *	34	Los Angeles
Brian Driscoll	34	Philadelphia
Keith McLean	40	Philadelphia
Steve Robke *	30	Kansas City
Mike Skahan *	28	Kansas City
Scott Stephens *	38	Washington
Jim Walier	34	Philadelphia

* = US National Team Player

Cuba Roster

<u>Name</u>	<u>Club</u>	
Leonid Baro Espinosa	Univ. Habana	
Adian Bueno Bueno	Giraldillos	
Eutemio Speak Reyes	Martí	
Ivan Robert Suarez	Martí	
Mario Rafael Valle Martínez	Giraldillos	
Alexis Figueras Sosa	Giraldillos	Captain
Champierre Diaz Scull	Giraldillos	
Roberto Olima Coto	Univ. Habana	
Osiris Valdes Meralla	Giraldillos	
Chukin Chao Campanioni	Univ. Habana	

Final result: Atlantis 40 Cuba 12 (Half 26-7)



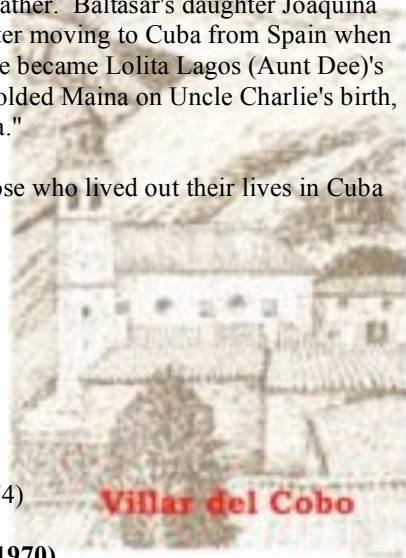
Appendix 3 Our Family in Cuba: A Review

Lorenzo. All of us -- the US relatives and all the Cuban relatives -- have as common ancestors Venancio Lorenzo and Feliciano Blas, married in Villar del Cobo, a tiny town in the province of Teruel, Spain, around 1835. The genealogy process has ingrained in me the realization that I am as much Blas as Signes, that you are as much Lorenzo as Lagos. It is only the accident of passing on the father's last name as the next generation's symbol that we are named as we are. Rather than being too philosophical on this point, I leave that to you.

At any rate, Joaquina Lorenzo Blas, my great-great grandmother, and her husband Francisco Grazziani / Graciani, are the common ancestors for all the US relatives. Joaquina's brother Baltasar, however, is Isabelita's great-grandfather, and José Antonio's great-great-grandfather. Baltasar's daughter Joaquina Lorenzo Gómez holds a special place in our family's history as, after moving to Cuba from Spain when widowed, around 1916, she moved to New York in 1917 where she became Lolita Lagos (Aunt Dee)'s special caregiver in her first year or two of life. It was she who scolded Maina on Uncle Charlie's birth, "Why did you bring him in to the world? He's bothering my Lolita."

All of Baltasar's descendants, and spouses, are shown below. Those who lived out their lives in Cuba and/or remain now are shown in bold.

- 1-Venancio LORENZO (died before 15 Jun 1874)
sp: Feliciano BLAS (died before 15 Jun 1874)
- 2-Joaquina LORENZO BLAS (1836/37-1 Aug 1910)
sp: Francisco (Frasquito) GRACIANI (bef 1837-abt 1889)
This is our branch of the family (>= 276 descendants).
- 2-Ramona LORENZO BLAS (-)
No descendants.
- 2-Baltasar LORENZO BLAS (died bet Sep 1873 and Jun 1874)
sp: Antonia GÓMEZ DAÑATE (died aft 14 Jun 1907)



3-Joaquina LORENZO GÓMEZ (15 Jun 1874-7 Jul 1970)

Joaquina, who came to Cuba about 1916 to join her cousins Joaquín and Victorina Graciani, later lived with the Lagos family in New York where she helped take care of Lolita (Dee Dee) Lagos. She returned to Cuba in 1918 and lived out her life there.

- sp: Miguel MATEO LAFUENTE (abt 1842-1915/16)
- 4-Baltasar MATEO LORENZO (27 Nov 1898-7 Apr 1960)
- 4-Ceferina MATEO LORENZO (abt 1900-abt 1906)
- 4-Federina MATEO LORENZO (abt 1903-abt 1906)
- 4-Ricardo MATEO LORENZO (14 Jun 1907-4 Mar 1992)**
sp: **Herminia LLÓPIZ DÍAZ (22 Oct 1907-)**



- 5-Isabel (Isabelita) MATEO LLÓPIZ (24 Apr 1940-)**
sp: **José Antonio SUÁREZ VILLANUEVA (20 Dec 1941-)**
- 6-José Antonio SUÁREZ MATEO (6 Dec 1969-)**

Graciani. The Graciani (formerly Grazziani) branch is our link to Italy, and according to oral tradition, the first Grazziani moved from Lucca, Italy to Spain in the early 1830s.

At any rate, Francisco Graciani and his wife Joaquina Lorenzo had two children, Joaquín and Victorina. We in the US are all descended from Victorina. Joaquín also had children: Emilio, Joaquín and Manolita. All moved to Cuba around 1920.

Emilio, an actor, traveled through much of South America before settling in Ecuador in the 1930s, and it is this branch, now "found," that I reported lost last year. Joaquín had no children, died young and is buried in the same grave in Havana as our ancestor Victorina and her second husband Manuel Lagos.



Manolita and her family remained in Cuba, and she is Alicia's mother and Roxana's grandmother. Those who lived out their lives in Cuba and/or remain now are shown in bold.

1-Francisco (Frasquito) GRACIANI (bef 1837-abt 1889)

sp: Joaquina LORENZO BLAS (1836/37-1 Aug 1910)

2-Joaquín GRACIANI LORENZO (14 May 1858-14 Jun 1920)

sp: Manuela SÁNCHEZ (-1910)

3-Emilio Joaquín GRACIANI SÁNCHEZ (16 Apr 1898-18 Jun 1981)

sp: Graciela PALMA (-)

4-Emilio GRACIANI PALMA (21 Oct 1938-)

sp: M^a Luisa BUENO VILLACIS (12 Apr 1948-)

5-María Elena GRACIANI BUENO (23 Oct 1974-)

5-Emilia GRACIANI BUENO (7 Jan 1976-)

5-Emilio GRACIANI BUENO (7 Jan 1976-)

sp: Elisa Inés (Inés) ENCALADA ESCALANTE (20 Apr 1915-10 Nov 1998)

4-Inés Alicia (Alicia) GRACIANI ENCALADA (12 May 1951-)

This is the cousin and goddaughter of Alicia from Cuba, who was "missing" until this year. All of her children-- Judy, Roberto, and Cristina -- now live in the USA.

sp: Edmundo Bolívar (Bolívar) RIVERA MANTILLA (13 Nov 1944)

5-Judith Alicia (Judy) RIVERA GRACIANI (27 Sep 1972-)

sp: Gerard Noel (Gary) FOLEY (19 Dec 1965-)

5-Roberto Marcelo RIVERA GRACIANI (12 Jun 1976-)

5-Andrea Cristina (Cristina) RIVERA GRACIANI (9 Aug 1977-)

3-Joaquín Emilio GRACIANI SÁNCHEZ (bef 1906-9 Jul 1931)

3-Manuela Catalina (Manolita) GRACIANI SÁNCHEZ (25 Nov 1906-30 Jun 1989)

sp: Francisco PELLÓN COUCEIRO (-)

4-Alicia M^a PELLÓN GRACIANI (2 Sep 1940-)

sp: Juan Hilario BORGES RODRÍGUEZ (13 Nov 1927-22 Dec 1999)

5-Roxana BORGES PELLÓN (5 Dec 1970-)

sp: Joel GUTIÉRREZ JÁNEZ (-)

6-Jonathan GUTIÉRREZ BORGES (2 Mar 1992-)

2-Victorina GRACIANI LORENZO (23 Mar 1862-14 Jul 1931)

sp: Ricardo Julián BESTEIRO FERNÁNDEZ (7 Feb 1854-25 Jun 1899)

This is our branch of the family (>= 259 descendants).

sp: Manuel LAGOS TOLEDO (3 Jan 1878-26 Jul 1960)

3-Francisco LAGOS GRACIANI (13 Oct 1908-c. 1910)

Genealogically, tío Manuel is only of curiosity value. He was my great grandmother's second husband, but they had no surviving children. He was also my grandfather's brother -- two brothers who married mother and daughter.

Besteiro. Victorina Graciani, widow of Ricardo Besteiro, moved to Cuba after marrying her new husband Manuel Lagos. More details are given below. The "US Lagos family" is descended from Victorina's daughter Pepita Besteiro (our Maina) and her husband Antonio Lagos (Manuel's brother).

1-Ricardo Julián BESTEIRO FERNÁNDEZ (7 Feb 1854-25 Jun 1899)

sp: Victorina GRACIANI LORENZO (23 Mar 1862-14 Jul 1931)

After Ricardo's death, Victorina and Manuel Lagos moved to Cuba with 4 of her 5 children.

2-Domingo (Uncle Dominic) José Julián BESTEIRO GRACIANI (9 Jan 1883-24 Oct 1958)

Moved to Cuba about 1905 and married there. His 4 children were all born in Havana. One-- Miguel Ángel -- stayed with his family. Raquelita and her family moved to Miami. Ricardo's widow and children moved to Miami. Bellita and her family moved to Venezuela.

2-Josefa Justa (Pepita) [Maina] BESTEIRO GRACIANI (6 Aug 1884-4 Feb 1968)

Moved to Cuba about 1905, and married Antonio Lagos there. Had three children born in Cuba, one in Spain, two in US. Entire family raised in US (118 descendants).

2-Emilio BESTEIRO GRACIANI (29 Jun 1886-10 Aug 1936)

Only sibling to never leave Spain (17 descendants).





2-Jorge Amando BESTEIRO GRACIANI (18 Jun 1889-1 Sep 1936)
Lived briefly in Cuba but returned to Spain where he married, lived, died, and had 9 children
(>=78 descendants).

2-Isabel Cecilia Alejandra (Aunt Betty) BESTEIRO GRACIANI (4 Jun 1896-6 Oct 1980)
Moved to Cuba about 1905 and married there. Her two children were born in Havana. Nena and her family stayed in Havana. Pepe and his family moved to Puerto Rico.

In all cases, those who lived out their lives in Cuba and/or remain now are shown in bold.

A list of Domingo's descendants follows.

1-Domingo (Uncle Dominic) José Julián BESTEIRO GRACIANI (9 Jan 1883-24 Oct 1958)
sp: Mercedes LORET DE MOLA BETANCOURT (13 Jan-13 Oct 1936)

2-Ricardo Víctor Luis BESTEIRO LORET DE MOLA (19 Aug 1916-12 Sep 1966)

sp: Bértila PÉREZ Y ALARD (13 Mar-)

3-Gloria BESTEIRO PÉREZ (27 Mar 1948-)

sp: Horacio GUTIÉRREZ SILVA (-)

sp: Benjamín SCHLESINGER (-)

sp: Joaquín VALOR (-)

3-Ricardo Domingo (Ricky) BESTEIRO PÉREZ (3 Jun 1954-)

sp: Esposa 1ª de Ricky Besteiro APELLIDO-1? APELLIDO-2? (-)

sp: Esposa 2ª de Ricky Besteiro APELLIDO-1? APELLIDO-2? (-)

sp: Vivian VALLADARES APELLIDO-2? (-)

4-Richard BESTEIRO VALLADARES (-)

4-Alexander BESTEIRO VALLADARES (-)

4-Viviana BESTEIRO VALLADARES (-)

2-Miguel Ángel Narciso BESTEIRO LORET DE MOLA (29 Oct 1918-)

sp: Zoila Lila (Lila) BLANCO ORTIZ (14 Jul 1923-17 Mar 1995)

3-Miguel Ángel (Micky, Miguelito) BESTEIRO BLANCO (20 Dec 1942-)

sp: Silvia CASTRO GONZÁLEZ (3 Nov 1942-)

4-Jorge BESTEIRO CASTRO (22 Feb 1973-)

4-Carlos BESTEIRO CASTRO (27 Jan 1974-)

3-Mercedes (Mercy, Merceditas) BESTEIRO BLANCO (2 Jul 1947-)

sp: Enrique ORTEGA MORALES (-)

4-Enrique ORTEGA BESTEIRO (14 May 1970-)

sp: Sussett CHARLES SANSON (25 Aug 1972-)

4-Geovanny ORTEGA BESTEIRO (21 Jul 1973-)

sp: Yohanka RODRÍGUEZ PUPO (31 Aug 1977-)

5-Daniel ORTEGA RODRÍGUEZ (20 Mar 1996-)

2-Isabel Josefa Consuelo (Bellita) BESTEIRO LORET DE MOLA (2 Sep 1922-)

sp: Aurelio DE LA VEGA Y GÓMEZ DE MOLINA (-4 Aug 1984)

3-Marco Aurelio DE LA VEGA BESTEIRO (1 Apr 1943-)

sp: Magaly NORIEGA ABREU (-)

4-Miguel Angel (Mickey) DE LA VEGA NORIEGA (25 Sep 1971-)

4-Kariana DE LA VEGA NORIEGA (22 Sep 1986-)

3-Eric DE LA VEGA BESTEIRO (24 May-)

sp: Mª Cristina QUESADA CALDERÍN (-)

4-Karla C. DE LA VEGA QUESADA (13 Apr 1971-)

4-Erika P. DE LA VEGA QUESADA (13 Mar 1975-)

sp: Xiomara C. VASQUES GUILLEN (-)

4-Xioreli K. DE LA VEGA VASQUES (8 Nov 1990-)

3-Darío DE LA VEGA BESTEIRO (28 Jan 1946-)

sp: Marité SMITH SAN MARTÍN (-)

4-Isabel (Isa) DE LA VEGA SMITH (-)

4-William (Willy) DE LA VEGA SMITH (-)

4-Daniela DE LA VEGA SMITH (-)



- sp: Cristina JIMÉNEZ CONTRERAS (29 Jun 1954-)
- 2-Raquel M^a Margarita (Raquelita) BESTEIRO LORET DE MOLA (10 Jun 1926-)
- sp: José Hiran Ciro (Pepe) SUÁREZ IRIZARRY (14 Jul 1918-8 Sep 1998)
- 3-Raquel Alicia SUÁREZ BESTEIRO (16 Dec 1950-7 Jan 1958)**
- 3-Rodolfo José (Rodolfito, Rudy) SUÁREZ BESTEIRO (22 Dec 1953-)
- sp: Vivian Josefina MURSULI IRIZARRY (19 Mar 1951-)
- 4-Vivian Lisa SUÁREZ MURSULI (25 May 1979-)
- 4-Angeline SUÁREZ MURSULI (11 Dec 1980-)

A list of Isabel's descendants follows.

- 1-Isabel Cecilia Alejandra (Aunt Betty) BESTEIRO GRACIANI (4 Jun 1896-6 Oct 1980)**
- sp: **Mario GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ (-22 Feb 1972)**
- 2-Isabel (Nena) GARCÍA BESTEIRO (25 Apr 1921-10 Jul 1991)**
- sp: **Arturo (Bebo) VALDÉS-DENIS GONZÁLEZ (8 Aug 1919-)**
- 3-Diana María VALDÉS-DENIS GARCÍA (3 Apr 1941-)**
- sp: **Celestino DELGADO CASTELLANO (-29 Jan 2000)**
- 4-Arturo Celestino (Arturito) DELGADO VALDÉS-DENIS (19 Aug 1964-)
- sp: **Maribel COLLAZO MAURI (18 Jun 1965-)**
- 5-Mario Arturo DELGADO COLLAZO (22 Jul 1999-)
- 4-Diana Isabel DELGADO VALDÉS-DENIS (9 Oct 1966-)
- sp: **Señor 1 LIMONTA APELLIDO-2? (-)**
- 5-Eduardo Alberto LIMONTA DELGADO (16 Jul 1981-)
- sp: **Señor 2 CASTRO APELLIDO-2? (-)**
- 5-Fidel Alejandro CASTRO DELGADO (16 Jan 1989-)
- sp: **Fernando HENRÍQUEZ MESA (9 Oct 1966-)**
- 5-Fernando HENRÍQUEZ DELGADO (4 Jul 1994-)
- sp: **Simón GOLDSZTEIN ROSENFELD (2 Aug 1937-)**
- 2-José de Jesús (Pepe) GARCÍA BESTEIRO (15 Oct 1928-)
- sp: Olga MUXÓ DE LA CUESTA (9 Jun 1929-)
- 3-Olga María GARCÍA MUXÓ (28 Dec 1953-)
- sp: Eduardo MARÍN ARIAS (1 Dec 1953-20 Jan 1991)
- 4-Gabriel MARÍN GARCÍA (10 Dec 1987-)
- sp: William MITCHELL (abt 14 Feb 1948-)
- 3-Mario José GARCÍA MUXÓ (18 Jun 1960-)
- sp: Irene BANUCHI GARCÍA (-)
- 4-Mario Andrés GARCÍA BANUCHI (4 Jan 1994-)
- 4-Irene Sofia GARCÍA BANUCHI (14 Jan 1995-)





Appendix 4: Uncle Manny (R.I.P.) and Cuba

While I was in the process of writing this piece, Uncle Manny (Manuel Francisco Ricardo Napoleón Lagos Besteiro) died (in Paterson on October 2, 2000). Uncle Manny had a unique relationship with Cuba, having lived there longer than any of his siblings.

After two children born in the US had died as infants, Maina (Pepita) decided to return to Cuba to bear her next child, our Aunt Dee (María de los Dolores Emilia Manuela Lagos y Besteiro). Aunt Dee was born on New Year's Day 1917. In March, Maina received a wire from her husband stating that they needed to return to New York immediately because the US was about to declare war on Germany and after that shipping would surely be curtailed.

They left on March 29, arrived on April 2, and the US declared war on Germany on April 6.

Unfortunately, Uncle Manny was diagnosed with conjunctivitis (pink eye) and was not allowed to leave. Fearing they'd all have to stay an indefinite amount of time during what was becoming a prolonged war, Maina left Manolito with her siblings.

No one knows exactly how long he stayed, but it seems to have been between 2 and 3 years. During that time period he lived with Maina's sister Isabel Besteiro (Aunt Betty) and attended Colegio Besteiro, a school run by Maina's brother Domingo Besteiro (Uncle Dominic).



**Colegio Besteiro about 1918. Uncle Dominic in center.
Manny Lagos is almost certainly the boy in front of him.**



Cuba, How Enigmatic is Cuba

¡Cuba, qué linda es Cuba! (Eduardo Saborit, 1960)

**Oye: tu que dices que tu patria no es tan linda
oye: tu que dices que lo tuyo no es tan bello
yo te invito a que busques por el mundo
otro cielo tan azul como tu cielo
Una luna tan brillante como aquella
que se filtra la dulzura de la caña
un Fidel que vibra en la montaña
un rubí, cinco franjas y una estrella**

**¡Cuba, qué linda es Cuba!
quien la defiende la quiere mas.
¡Cuba, qué linda es Cuba!
ahora que es libre la quiero mas.
Cuba, qué linda es Cuba!
ahora sin yanquis la quiero mas.**

Cuba, How Lovely is Cuba! (Eduardo Saborit, 1960)

**Listen, you who says your country is not so lovely
Listen, you who says what you have isn't beautiful
I ask you to search the whole world over
For a sky as blue as your sky
A moon as brilliant as that moon
Which filters the sweetness of the cane.
A Fidel who resonates in the mountains
A ruby, five stripes, and a star**

**Cuba, how lovely is Cuba!
They who defend her love her more.
Cuba, how lovely is Cuba!
Now that she's free I love her more.
Cuba, how lovely is Cuba!
Now without Yankees I love her more.**