

FOREWORD

It has been widely assumed that all or practically all of Cuba's former ruling class abandoned the country in the years immediately following the triumph of the revolution led by Fidel Castro. In fact, however, many members of the country's upper social stratum remained in Cuba. Some became actively involved in the Revolution; others chose to remain on the sidelines, but all have seen their life profoundly altered by it.

In 1976, intrigued by their acquaintance with several women from this former upper class, the authors of the present book conceived the idea of collecting their stories. Two interviews were accordingly carried out in 1976. At that point, however, other activities of both authors obliged them to lay the project aside, reluctantly but only, they thought, temporarily. The hiatus, as it happened, lasted almost eighteen years, and it was only in 1994 that work on the book was resumed in earnest.

In the interim, profound changes had taken place in Cuba's economic situation following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the other European socialist countries that had been the Island's chief trading partners since the early 1960s. A 50-percent reduction in the Island's supply of oil, formerly received from the Soviet Union in exchange for sugar, had forced the government to apply rigorous energy-saving measures such as 35 hours of power outages per week, the introduction of tens of thousands of bicycles to help solve the problem of mass transportation, and the use of oxen to replace tractors on farms and cane plantations.

Worsening the situation still further was an intensification in 1991 of the U.S. embargo on trade with Cuba, sharply limiting its possibilities of obtaining credit and of buying and selling goods. Shortages of all kinds, including medicines, food and clothing, made life painfully difficult for the average Cuban citizen.

Our original purpose in writing this book had been to learn the reasons that had motivated so many women from the former ruling class to remain in their country after 1959. Now we were also interested in knowing if, in the new, harsh conditions of life, they regretted that decision. We thus returned to our original interviewees to update their stories and then added five more.

Of the numerous possibilities suggested to us, we had decided from the beginning to include only seven stories — in part, because of a predilection for the number seven and, in part, to avoid repetition of experiences. Each of the stories differs notably from the others but all have one common element — love

of country. Carried out in the form of preliminary conversations followed by direct, recorded interviews, our inquiry rewarded us with what we consider to be fascinating glimpses into the lives of these women both before and after the radical upheaval of 1959.

The interviewees include:

- one of Cuba's wealthiest sugar heiresses (if not the wealthiest), who after the nationalization of her family's three sugar mills has continued to live in the luxury that epitomized the lifestyle of Cuba's former upper class;
- a "poor little rich girl", whose drastically altered life has, nevertheless, brought her a special kind of happiness;
- the first wife of Cuba's wealthiest tobacco heir, a member of the country's aristocracy and a descendant of the Spanish explorer Ponce de León (of Fountain-of-Youth fame), who, following the Revolution, became one of the Island's top TV directors;
- the dynamic distaff member of a prominent Cuban husband-wife team of architects:
- a well-known painter, who, when her American businessman husband left Cuba to return to the States, stayed behind and went on to become the director of Havana's Higher Institute of Art;
- a descendant of South American Liberator Simón Bolívar and member of one of Cuba's wealthiest families, who took part in the underground struggle against military dictator Fulgencio Batista and has since become an authority and published author on Afro-Cuban religions;
- the wife of one of Cuba's leading lawyers and descendant of one of the country's most distinguished families, who, in the 1970s, became a university professor in the field of English-language teaching.

The authors

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LAURA GOMEZ TARAFA

Cubanacán is unquestionably the most beautiful residential section of Havana. Formerly called Country Club, it is an area of rolling hills, trees and great expanses of lawn adorned with flowers and flowering shrubs surrounding palatial homes. There we went, by prior appointment, to interview Laura Gómez Tarafa, known to her family and friends as "Chinie." Upon arrival at the house, widely considered one of the most beautiful in Cuba, we rang a large iron bell hanging beside two heavy wooden gates guarding the entrance to the grounds and immediately heard the barking of what sounded like very large dogs on the other side. Peering over the wall beside the gate, we saw a woman-servant emerge from the house carrying a large pot, presumably containing food, at the same time that she called out to two handsome Dobermans, who obediently followed her. A moment later, with the dogs safely out of the way, the gate was opened, enabling us to drive up the circular driveway to the house, where our hostess awaited us on the front portico.

Chinie is an attractive, poised, exquisitely groomed woman who appears to be in her sixties. Unlike our other interviewees, she had at first been reluctant to grant an interview and had only finally acceded after persuasion by a mutual friend. But now she greeted us warmly and led us into her entrance hall, then through a stunningly elegant drawing room and a library with richly paneled, book-lined walls to a charming sitting room. Each of the spacious rooms we passed through overlook a splendid back terrace, ample enough to comfortably accommodate at least one hundred persons.

As we settled in the sitting room, Chinie offered us tea, a drink, or orange juice ("The oranges are from our own trees."). We chose juice, brought to us shortly by the same woman-servant who had called away the Dobermans, and Chinie began to speak in excellent English.

I want to be very, very frank with you. I don't feel I'm a proper person for your book because the other women you have interviewed have all held jobs or worked for the Government in some way, and I have never worked.

We interrupted to assure her that Lili del Campo was another instance of a woman who had never held a job or worked for the Government and that, in any event, that was not the point of our book. We want people, we told her, who are different from one another, who have a different story.

Yes, I can understand that, but I really don't know...As I say, I have never worked — except for charity activities, of course. I worked for the Cancer League and for the blind here. And when I was a student at Spence in New York, I worked for the American Red Cross as a volunteer. We used to visit all the poor people up in Harlem and so forth. And also Spence supported a nursery for babies who were available for adoption, and we used to sew and mend clothes for the babies on Friday nights. But, of course, all of that was charity work, and I've always been —just a housewife.

Did you attend Spence because you lived in New York or did you only go to school there?

I never lived permanently in New York. I studied at Spence and also at Finch and, from the time I was two years old, my family used to go to New York every year, so that it was practically

my second home town. But I haven't been back there in all these years. (*Chinie paused briefly, then continued.*) Let me tell you that my husband has been in prison as a political prisoner three times, twice because he was accused of being the head of the CIA in Cuba! So, although I adore New York, I haven't wanted to go back, always afraid of any possible suspicions of contact with the CIA. (*She smiled wryly.*) So when I'm here, I'm associated with the CIA and, when I go out of the country, I'm associated with Fidel Castro!

Damned if you do and damned if you don't?

Yes. As we say in Spanish, like the priest at the party who can neither stay nor leave!

I've never been political, nor has anyone in my family. My father inherited a cigar business from his uncle, who was like a father to him, since my father was orphaned as a baby. When my paternal grandfather, who was Spanish, died in France, my grandmother came to Cuba with her son, my father, to live with her eldest sister, who had no children. Her sister's husband owned the two cigar factories that were passed on to my father, but those were later sold to some Englishmen.

My mother's money came only from sugar and land, so we were never involved with politics, and I wouldn't like this interview to have anything to do with politics.

We again reassured her that our purpose was not to write a political book, but a book about women of the upper class who had remained in Cuba after the Revolution, their reasons for choosing to stay, and how this decision had affected their lives.

Well, in my own case...My family has always been a bit like nomads. Ever since I was a baby, my mother lived six months in Europe and six months here, and so I know much of Europe — not South America — and the United States. And I feel that some people left because, for them, it was an opportunity — perhaps to travel or to get a house and so forth, and others left thinking the Americans would throw Fidel Castro out and, in six months, they would come back on the victory train.

I suppose most of the people from this neighborhood left the country?

The majority of those who lived in this neighborhood were Englishmen and Americans. There were the Chase Bank people and the people from the Electric Company and the railroads and so forth. But there were very few Cubans. And not one of them was political. So why did they go? I really don't know. Because I'm here. And I belonged to one of the most hated groups — the sugar people. Sugar is the biggest industry in the country, and it was the first one taken over. But I'm here.

Fear can be a powerful motive.

Well, I can tell you that I've gone through a lot of — what shall I say? — situations that weren't the happiest or the best, but at the same time, I've always been treated with respect. I feel that if you demand respect, you will be respected, no matter where you are. And I've always acted in my own way.

When the Revolution took place on January 1st, 1959, my youngest daughter was here on holiday from her school in Rome, where my mother had been living since 1953, and I had the opportunity to send a message to Fidel Castro that my child was here and had to leave in a few days to go back to Rome. And he, personally, signed her exit permit. She was in and out many times because she always came home for holidays, first from her school in Rome and later from her studies at the University of Geneva, and she never had any trouble with her visa.

Then, afterwards, when I married my present husband, Yayo Bonet, it turned out that, since he is from Bayamo¹, he was a friend of Celia Sánchez². They had gone to school together and been friends since childhood. So I met Celia, and she was always very kind and helpful. It's only fair to say so.

But in spite of that friendship with a person so high up, your husband was arrested on political charges?

Yes. The first time was for something totally absurd, because of a personal vendetta. My husband's name is Conrado Bonet, and he's a lawyer. He was in the same class at the University with Fidel Castro and with Fidel's brother-in-law, Rafael Díaz Balart. Then, during the insurrection against Batista, he went up into the Sierra Maestra mountains to join the rebels and, while he was there, he had personal problems with Humberto Sorí Marín, one of the *Comandantes*. After the Revolution took power, Yayo left the Rebel Army and Sorí Marín became very powerful. But he was a horrible person, and he accused Yayo of ridiculous things and had him arrested. In the Sierra Maestra, Yayo had defended a boy that Sorí Marín wanted to have shot because he had stolen a cow, and there was some absurd thing about a truckload of candies and other things! I had just married Yayo, and I went to see Sorí Marín. He said it was a pity that Yayo hadn't wanted to stay in the Army and the Government because he was very clever—in fact, brilliant— and he assured me that he would do everything possible on Yayo's behalf. But when the trial came up, he was the only one who accused him! So Yayo went to prison on the Isle of Pines for a year. Nobody went to the Isle of Pines with a sentence of less than six years, but Yayo was sent there with only a two-year sentence!

But there's a denouement. At the beginning of the Revolution, the Brazilians were very sympathetic to Fidel. He was a good friend of the Brazilian Ambassador, as I was, too, and the Ambassador's daughter, Isabel, was like a sister to me. At the time, I was divorced. Well, when Yayo had to go to trial in May of '59, I went with Isabel to the Cabaña Fortress, where all the military trials were held at the time. When we reached the guardhouse, I was able to go in because I had a pass signed by Camilo Cienfuegos³ that the Ambassador had gotten for me — because I had never met Camilo. But Isabel wasn't allowed to go in. She insisted that I go ahead and that she would call one of the officers of the Cabaña that she knew. It was raining and, while she was waiting, Sorí Marín arrived in his car and asked, surprised, "Ah, Isabelita! What are you doing here?" When she told him she was waiting to go in to attend the trial of Yayo Bonet, he told his chauffeur, "Drive on!", and he left her standing there in the rain.

Well, time went by and, about a year later, that man got into very serious trouble and asked for asylum in the Brazilian Embassy, and they turned him down because of the incident at the Cabaña Fortress. It cost him his life, because he was caught and shot.

Shot?

Yes. He was sent before a firing squad and shot as a traitor. He was involved in some counter-revolutionary plot. I don't know all that he did, but one of the things I do know about is that he used to go to the office of my family's sugar business and collect 500 pesos every week, although he claimed to be so pure.

Was that during the Batista period?

No! At the beginning of the Revolution. He was the Minister of Agriculture. During the insurrection, many Cuban businesses had contributed money to help finance the struggle in the Sierra Maestra. But then, after the Revolution, he went on collecting money!

You mentioned that you were divorced when you met your present husband. Who was your first husband?

I was married to Charley Govea. He had farms, and his father was a big contractor who built the Central Highway and the Malecón and many other things. Charley studied at the New York Military Academy and, later, when the Second World War came, he went into the U.S. Army and was the aide to General Wade at the San Antonio Base during the war.

Did you live in the States while he was stationed there?

No, no. I lived here with our daughters. Then, later, I divorced him and, three years later, I met Yayo.

Chinie, Lili del Campo told me that she attended your first wedding at the Havana Cathedral, and that it was gorgeous, the most magnificent wedding anyone in Havana ever remembered seeing.

Yes, it certainly was elaborate. I'd have preferred something simpler, but my mother planned it. Among other things, since the walls of the Cathedral were very old and deteriorated, they were covered over with curtains of gardenias.

Real gardenias?

Oh, yes. Fresh gardenias, hundreds and hundreds of them. People were quite impressed.

In contrast, I married Yayo in prison, at the Cabaña Fortress, and this is the marriage that has lasted.

But, as I say, it's because of the accusations against Yayo that I haven't wanted to go back to New York. I don't want to give anyone a chance...I've always gone to Europe when I travel. I've gone abroad sixteen times during the Revolution, and I've never had any problem with that. Whenever I want to leave, they give me a travel permit for three months, and I've never overstayed it.

I understand that many people request extensions of their stays abroad and that they are normally granted.

I've always preferred to return within the time indicated.

Have you traveled recently?

Yes, we were in Canada last Christmas. We went up to see my grandson. In fact, we've gone twice because we miss him very much. What happened is that my youngest daughter, who is very happy-go-lucky, has been married several times, but her first husband was a brother of Celia Sánchez. They had a son and then divorced soon after. So from the time the boy was six months old, he lived here with my husband and me. We always took him to school, and he was more like our child than our grandchild. But then, recently, my daughter married an Italian she met here in Cuba, and they took the boy away with them, although they were supposedly only going on a trip. And now he is living and studying in Canada.

I've always wanted him to study whatever he preferred and, though I had always thought of his being educated in England, if he likes Canada, it's all right. At least, I'm glad he's not in Miami.

You don't like Miami?

I detest it! We went there last year so that Yayo could meet his grandchildren, because all his family is in Miami. I found it impossible. I think I would die if I had to live there.

How old is your grandson?

He's twenty-two now, a very serious boy. He studied here through the pre-university level, senior high school, and he finished with an average of 98.6. Considering who he was, I think that's very good, and he never had any bad mark of any kind on his record. So I always thought of his studying outside Cuba and then, later, to come back if he wanted to return, but always to come home for holidays, because I feel a young person needs the family and to know what's going on in his country. So I'm just waiting for him to get his residence in Canada and then I'll request his re-entry permit.

How long ago did he go there?

In May, he will have been in Canada two years. He was going to be interviewed for residence in October, but some nice Cuban from Miami — and we've since learned who it was — made a report that he is the nephew of Celia Sánchez and that his grandmother lives in Cuba and patronizes the Government, etc. Then a lot of nonsense was published in the newspaper, so they have postponed his interview until February.

How odd that that should be given importance in Canada.

(Chinie nodded.) In Canada! It's the eternal story of envy. You know, my grandfather always said that the only poisonous thing we have in Cuba is envy. We have no poisonous snakes or dangerous animals, but Cubans are extremely envious. Of course I spend dollars here, but what Cuban who has had the opportunity to receive dollars from outside the country hasn't? So why should I be singled out? At the beginning, of course, there were only about five Cubans —Julián de Zulueta and a few others, about five of us in all— who had the privilege of using dollars here.

From the very beginning?

Not the very beginning. I was allowed to do it beginning about '67. Before that, no. We lived just with the ration card and our savings.

You mentioned that the Government has always respected you. Why do you think that is?

Maybe, and I don't want to sound like a snob, but it's probably because I belonged to the upper class of Cuba, socially and economically. My grandfather was Colonel Tarafa, who was a great businessman and sugar man, known all over the world.

He owned sugar mills?

We had three sugar mills and we had five thousand *caballerías*⁴ of land in Vertientes and three thousand in Matanzas and so forth. He was so well known that we received letters from all over the world when he died. He was a financier, and he also built the Northern Cuba Railway Line and Puerto Tarafa.

That is a port?

Yes. The name was changed to Puerto Angola, but everyone still calls it Puerto Tarafa. He wasn't like Julio Lobo, whom you've probably heard of, or Pancho Blanco, who speculated on the world sugar market. No. My grandfather was a sugar man, not a speculator. I remember that, in the Machado⁵ period, there was something called the Chadbourne Plan, presented by an American who was a very good friend of the Falla Bonets, who were big sugar people, and my grandfather had presented a Plan Tarafa as an alternative. But Machado chose the Chadbourne Plan, and it was the ruin of the country. I don't say this because he was my grandfather, but he was really very clever and he knew everything about sugar.

He was your mother's father?

Yes. My mother was Laura Tarafa. I am Laura Gómez Tarafa, and my younger daughter is Laura Govea, but we call her Lauretta.

But you are usually referred to as Chinie Tarafa.

Yes. I suppose because the family name is so well known.

And where did the name Chinie come from?

It's a pet name I was given because my eyes were slanted almost like those of a Chinese baby when I was small. That's a characteristic from my mother's side of the family.

Was your maternal grandmother Cuban?

Yes, and she and my grandfather had five children. My mother was the eldest. Then my Aunt Graciela, who was married to Oscar Cintas, whom you've probably heard of. He was one of the owners of the Cannon factory and he had a marvelous art collection. I remember that he lent several of his oil paintings to the New York World's Fair. Then there was my Aunt Fifi, who never married, my Uncle Miguel, who passed away in Miami about three years ago. Miguel had only one son. The son lives in Costa Rica and was visiting here just last week for the first time in thirty-some years.

I have two other cousins. They both live in Miami. We were just four cousins, and I was the only girl. Now, one of them has multiple sclerosis and has been in a wheelchair for the last ten years, which is pitiful because he's such a nice boy, such a good looking young man! He married Alice Mellon, one of Mellon's granddaughters, and now she's divorced him. You know how it is — now that he's so ill.

And he's been very, very low. Well, anyway, he's in a wheelchair and has a male nurse night and day because he can't even walk. So that's my family.

Do you feel very bitter about the loss of your family properties?

The worst thing I find about the Revolution is not what they've taken or not taken. I can live nicely. I don't regret it so much. I regret the mills because one of them, the Central Cuba, was built by my grandfather. He bought up sixteen sugar mills and tore them down and made the Cuba the most modern and the best in the country. My cousin went to see it the other day. I've never wanted to go because I haven't wanted anyone to think...Look, when you've walked prisons, as I have, you think twice about doing anything that could be interpreted...It's a shoe that, if you haven't worn it, you don't know how it is.

But my cousin went, and he said that my grandfather's house is so destroyed! It was built in 1886, and now they have crazy people in that house, a house that is a national monument!

It's a psychiatric hospital?

Yes, yes — for crazy people. It's not that we want the house. We all have our houses. In fact, my mother's house is just across the street, and my uncle's house was just next to it. And when my mother passed away, Celia Sánchez said, "If you want to move, you can take it." But I told her, "No, no. My mother's house is beautiful, but it's like a *petit palais*, and I prefer my own house."

Who has your mother's house now?

Oh, my lord! You should see it! When they started with tourism, the INIT took it, and they were making necklaces and guano hats and a lot of things for tourists. There were beautiful paneled walls in the living room, all hand-carved, that my mother had brought from France, and they nailed all that junk to it. It's incredible. Then there is a beautiful Lalique glass window with the figure of a woman that they tried to remove in order to sell it, but it's so well put in that they haven't been able to remove it. But the rest of the house! All the floors are Botticino, like my house, but they are all stained, and it's a mess. Then Celia gave the order that I could go and take the family things I wanted, such as my grandmother's rocking chair, but I never went. On the lawn, there are two large *tinajones* ⁶ that my grandfather used for water during the war, and they are still sitting there.

Which war was that?

Our first War of Independence, the Ten Years' War ⁷. My grandfather was a colonel in that war and he participated in three expeditions carrying supplies from New York for the war.

My mother always said, "Our father left us in a good financial position, but the best thing he left was his name, because wherever he went, we always find the door open." And he always told

me, "When you are outside the country, you are not Laura Gómez; you're a Cuban. So be sure you never do anything that is improper because in the outside world they think that, if you are from Cuba, you are an Indian."

I was brought up like that, very Cuban, but very proper, and I'm grateful for that. Because you have to respect if you want to be respected. And I think that's why I'm respected here. In any country where you go, you have to respect the government and the laws. So I have always respected them here and, as I'm not political, they have always reciprocated. But, since you asked me, I think it's also because I belonged to the high financial world and to the old Cuban society —not to the nouveau riche.

Have any of the other old families from this neighborhood remained here?

Well, there were never many, as I told you. There was Julián de Zulueta, the banker and sugarmill owner also, and one other older gentleman, but I haven't seen either of them for some time, and I don't know if they are still here or if they've gone or, perhaps, died. Then there is Mary McCarthy, who lives on 23rd Avenue. You can see a bit of her house just through those trees. (Chinie pointed to a rooftop in the far distance beyond her garden.) She's Canadian, but she was married to a Cuban, and they were part of the old society. And on 25th Avenue, there's Odette Descamps. She and her brother stayed, but the brother died, and Mary tells me that a nephew or niece is living with Odette now so that she won't be alone and, of course, they will inherit the house eventually.

So we are the only ones here in Cubanacán, as it's called now, but we were never many. You know, this is really country, and most Cubans never liked to live in the country; they prefer the city.

You have a huge piece of property here, haven't you?

We have ten thousand square meters, the whole *manzana* ⁸, and it's not easy. It hasn't been easy to keep it up, because the gardeners don't know how to work. They want dollars, but really what they do is a mess. Most of the houses are occupied now by diplomats, and I don't know how they live in their country, but really, they don't know how to live so very well here. For instance, next door we have the Egyptians, and they keep lambs. The present ambassador seems quite civilized and speaks quite good English, but some of them...The son of one of them learned to drive a car all over the lawn and smashed into a tree! And when the previous ambassador lived there, his son and daughter used to pick the poor lambs up by their feet and throw them into the pool! And they kept turkeys in the garage. Such a mess!

And the trees! Jani Bulgar is a very good friend of ours —those are the Italian jewelers, who were close friends of my mother's in Rome— and when the younger Bulgars, who are friends of ours, were visiting us, they asked, "Chinie, don't people here prune their trees?" If you look back there at the German Embassy, just beyond our grounds, you think the trees are going to reach heaven!

Mostly, the Germans have been very nice, although there was one, a woman, who was horrible. I had been warned by the wife of the previous ambassador that she was a very bad person. She said, "If you meet her by chance, all right, but I am not going to introduce her to you." And so I refused to receive her, but she insisted on visiting. Finally, after she had been living there for fifteen months, she complained to the Government that my geese were disturbing her. She complained to Public Health and to Foreign Relations and I don't know who else, and I was finally obliged to get rid of them.

Of your geese?

Yes, my pet geese. She did it out of spite, but I had to take them away. It's terrible to have someone doing nasty things to you and not be able to do anything about it. The whole incident was so disagreeable and upset me so much that I developed diabetes. But a few months after that,

I went to Europe. I've always gone to Switzerland because that's where I have what my mother left me in my portfolio.

My banker is very prominent there and has known me since I was a child. When I told him about my geese, he wrote to Bonn and told them it was incredible that the German ambassadress had done such a low thing to me and that I was a Cuban but not a Communist. Well, in less than a month, the German Government took those people out of Cuba and, when they got to Germany, they were removed from the foreign service. Then she said terrible things about Cuba. And all that was just because I wouldn't make friends.

Perhaps there were other problems, too, that led the German government to make that decision.

Yes, there were. I learned about them later, after they sent four different investigators, and apparently her accounts were... For instance, she bought eight sets of silverware here. Imagine! I don't know anyone who has eight sets of silver! Well, she wasn't a good person.

The next ambassador was very, very nice and his wife as well. He came to call and told me that he knew what had happened and hoped to make amends, and we became very close friends.

What happened to the geese that you had to get rid of?

We took them to a farm near here, and every day we had to go and feed them. Then, when that woman left, we brought them back home.

Do you have them now?

Oh, yes.

And why do you like to keep geese?

Well, I'll tell you. When I was a little girl about seven years old, my grandfather brought some eggs of the Rhone geese, the ones they make *foie gras* from. They hatched at the sugar mill and he gave me one of the geese. I called him Tito and I had him for years. When I was in the country, he followed me everywhere and even sat behind me when I rode horseback. So I became fond of geese. Then one day when Celia Sánchez was visiting us, the subject of geese came up because she had been put in charge of a goose-breeding program, and I told her about Tito. She said she would send me two pairs of geese, and she did. That was over twenty-five years ago, and now we have nineteen! It's a problem because they eat grain, which we store in the basement, and the grain attracts rats. Some of them are as big as rabbits! And then we have to have the exterminators come. But I don't like to give my geese away because people eat them. I gave three to the Austrian ambassadress because she had a pair and one died, so she asked if I would sell her one of mine. We gave her three, so that she would have two couples. But I never give them to Cubans because, whenever I have, they've eaten them, and we have never eaten them. I don't like to think of them being eaten.

Also, you know, geese are very good guardians. If they see someone they don't know at night, they start calling. Another thing is that if you see them all coming up the hill toward the house, you can be sure it's going to rain. They come up to the terrace and stay there while it's raining, and then they all go back to their pond. They're very clever. When my husband calls them, they know his voice and answer.

Are they the only animals you have besides the dogs?

We have the two dogs, three kittens and the geese — not counting the rats, of course.

Chinie, how do you manage to keep everything in your house looking in such perfect condition?

It's very, very hard. For instance, when I go to Europe, I bring all of the materials I need back with me. I used to have to bring the paint as well, but now, fortunately, we can get that here. But

it's very hard to get good work done here. And most people steal from you. Upholsterers steal material and, for instance, we have the whole house air-conditioned, and when I had to have a motor repaired recently, they took my good one and changed it for another. I put in a claim, and now I'm trying to get it back.

It's ignorance. They don't really know how to work well. And also I think they just don't give a damn. For instance, when we were having the goose pond put in, I tried to give them the plans for the underground sprinkler system, but they didn't want them. They insisted they didn't need them

Then the bulldozers came in, and we had pipes standing up in the air everywhere! Even in the garden, I prune all the branches myself because they just chop them any old way.

How long have you lived in this house?

Forty years. I built it in 1953. Rafael de Cárdenas was my architect, a very good architect.

And did you grow up in this neighborhood?

Yes, in my mother's house just across the way. And also at the mill and on a farm that my mother owned in Wajay.

Which mill was that?

The Cuba Sugar Mill that I mentioned. We had the Cuba, the España, and the Santo Domingo mills. The three are in the province of Matanzas. The España belonged to Pepsi Cola, and my family bought it from them. But the Cuba was the best of all. It was fully electrified and very efficient. And we never had trouble with the workers because my grandfather always paid more than the normal salary. We had very good relations, and when we were at the mill, the door of our house there was always open. Imagine!

When my mother died in Rome and I brought her here for burial, a commission of about seventy workers came from the mill to attend her funeral. And that was after the Revolution. So, you see, we couldn't have been so bad as owners.

Your mother is buried in Havana?

Yes. Our family vault is in the small garden just to the left as you enter the Colón cemetery. We are all there —my grandfather and my grandmother, one of my uncles, my mother and my stepfather.

Not your father?

No. My father died many years ago, of cancer. He was just thirty-seven. And he is buried in the vault of his family because we hadn't bought our vault yet. My Aunt Graciela is buried in the Cintas vault, and the Cintas family had a replica of her patio built there. It had a large cross, but it was stolen. And we had a marble bench by our vault, where I always liked to sit when I went there, but it has been stolen, too —just in the last year. Ours also has a Sacred Heart that my aunt brought from Rome, where it was blessed by Pius XII. I suppose that hasn't been stolen because not many people are believers now. It's sad. Those things used to make me angry, but now they just depress me. I don't know what's happening to Cubans. I know people need things, but that's not the way.

Another thing that's very bad here now are the restaurants. All that French food, and they don't really know how to cook it. Lobster thermidor is just lobster and white sauce — no truffles and no mushrooms. The chefs are no good or they don't have the ingredients, I don't know which. But why don't they just cook good Cuban food? We have very good dishes when they are well prepared. And nobody goes to Italy, for example, to eat French food, so why do they insist on serving it here?

Do you eat out often?

Yes, fairly often for lunch. On Friday, my cook doesn't come, so we always go out for lunch and try the different restaurants. But I haven't had a good meal in any of them. Sometimes the restaurants are good at the beginning but then, later, they are not. There's one near here on a little road just off the avenue, called the Ranchón, that serves only Cuban food. It used to be quite good, but then it was closed. Now they've reopened it, so we'll see how it is.

Chinie, can you tell us something more about your childhood?

Much of my childhood was spent traveling because my mother was like a nomad. as I said. I had an English governess from the time I was four years old. So until I was fourteen or fifteen, I always traveled with my governess and, of course, she gave me classes and took care of me. I studied here at the Sacred Heart Academy, but not the whole year because when the time came to go to Europe, I was taken out and off we went. Afterwards, as I told you, I went to Spence, where I entered as a sophomore. I had a visitor from New York the other day who came to see me through mutual friends, and she was telling me that Spence is still the best school in the United States. It really was marvelous. There were only twelve students in each class and each teacher was an expert. Twice a week, we had seats at Carnegie Hall and we had a box at the Opera. We also had invited artists at the Spence School, and really it was fantastic. I always remember it. I was the only Latin girl who ever went there.

Really?

Yes. It wasn't easy to enter. It was very exclusive.

Have you kept up a relationship with any of your former classmates?

When I was married, three of them came to my wedding. One of them was the daughter of one of the heads of Eastern Airlines, and they flew down on an Eastern plane. And one of the girls who came to visit me afterwards married John Arthur, who was an Army man and the pilot of Winston Churchill when Churchill came to Cuba. She was Betty Jane Nevins. You know, they write to me and I write, but now I've given up writing because my letters never arrive. For instance, my daughter and my grandson have written to me from Canada, but I've never received even a postcard. So we speak by telephone. I don't know what happens. I receive mail from Europe, but very delayed. Christmas cards, for instance, arrive in March! Three months later!

Could you send mail with people who are traveling?

But with whom? I have no friends among the Miami community, and I don't know anyone who travels back and forth. I can't even imagine why anyone would want to travel back and forth. When we went to Miami last year, we sat in that airport for twelve hours, waiting for the plane to leave! There were no young people; they were all older people, and four were in wheelchairs. And we sat there from 7:00 in the morning until 7:00 at night. I think that's inhuman.

Was that the flight from here?

Yes, from here.

And whose fault was that?

I suppose it's the airline's. I really don't know, but it was terrible. So many things...At the same time, I think that life is hard everywhere. There are only happy moments, and you have to enjoy those. For the rest, there is always something. I believe in the Sacred Heart, and I always ask for Christian resignation.

We wanted to ask you about religion.

I have always been Catholic.

Do you go to church?

Once in a while, because lately...it's not very agreeable. For instance, my daughters attended the Sacred Heart Academy, as I did, and when I was divorcing, it was a problem because they didn't accept children of divorced parents. But the headmistress called me and told me that she knew I was getting a divorce but she also knew it wasn't my fault, so she said I could leave Laura there as long as I wished, and she stayed there until she left Cuba to go study in Rome. After my stepfather died, my mother bought an apartment in Rome, and Lauretta lived there with her. My other daughter, Josefina, also studied at the Sacred Heart and, later, at Mérici Academy.

Was your stepfather Italian?

No, no. He was Cuban. But after he died, my mother spent six months a year in Europe, and she didn't want to be always in hotels, so she bought an apartment. She preferred London and Paris, but the climate in Italy was better for her because she suffered from bronchitis. Even so, she finally died of bronchitis, in Rome.

Obviously, your family was very wealthy, but how did you manage to retain some of your wealth after all your sugar mills and land were nationalized by the Revolution?

Well, everything was nationalized except a person's house and personal belongings, including personal bank accounts. I had an account here and I had money in New York at the Morgan Trust Company. I also have furs at Maximilian's, by the way, that I haven't been able to take out because I live here. Then, my mother also had money in New York, which is frozen and which I haven't been able to touch, although she lived in Europe. But she also had money in Switzerland, a portfolio of stocks and bonds, and I inherited that when she died. But I can't write a check against that, of course. When I advise them that I need money, they cash some of the stocks. I have them send the money to England and from England it comes here to the *Banco Financiero* in dollars and to the *Banco Nacional* in pesos, and I draw on that. I pay for everything by check. I never use cash. I do that so that everything is always clear and open and legal. I never enter into any kind of "business."

In other words, anyone in your same position could have retained their wealth in the same way. Is that correct?

I imagine so, because they have never asked how much I have abroad or what I do with it. Never! Also, my mother had some money in the bank here, some 54,000 pesos, and that was given to me when she died. My family was the second or third largest shareholder in the Trust Company of Cuba, a Cuban bank, and she had the money there. The bank was nationalized, but they gave me the money.

There was an incident...After the Revolution, a lieutenant of the Rebel Army came and stole perfumes and other things from my mother's house and a silver elephant with jewels from my uncle's house next door to my mother's. Then he came and took away the car of an old couple just down the street. Then he came here and tried to 'requisition' a Corvette car I had. I told him he had better take out his revolver and shoot me because he was not going to take the Corvette any other way. Then I went to *Recuperación de Bienes*, the agency in charge of the expropriations, and denounced what the lieutenant was doing. The man in charge —I think his name was Alvarez — told me: "Señora, we know that yours is one of the Cuban fortunes that was accumulated honestly." Well, that was very pleasant. There was another man present, a military man, who said he was an aide of Raúl Castro⁹. He asked me to sign a statement about what I had reported. I did, and that lieutenant was arrested and thrown out of the Army. He was

simply looting all the houses. He was a bandit! So I feel that if people had stayed, they wouldn't have had problems — at least, if they were willing to defend their rights.

So you think the Government has been honest?

With me, I must say, they have been honest. It wouldn't be right to say anything else.

I'd like to ask a question, but if you find it too indiscreet, please say so.

I have no secrets.

You know, prices have skyrocketed abroad, and you live in a house that, in today's world...If this house were in Canada, for example, it would be worth several million dollars.

Yes. An ambassador here offered me five million U.S. dollars if I would sell it to him.

I'm not surprised.

Of course, the house occupies 852 square meters and everything is first class. The floors are all of Italian Botticino; the bathrooms are marble to the ceiling; the woodwork is of the finest quality, and it's in perfect condition. But even so, prices nowadays are crazy, absolutely crazy.

That's true. But do you feel, in fact, that you have a more beautiful place than you would have, say, if you left this country and went to live in New York or somewhere else?

Well, I had a beautiful home in Rome, my mother's. But I sold it because I don't want to have two houses. When I travel, I like to stay in hotels. That way, when I leave, I can simply close the door and let them take care of it. This is my home. Here I have all the remembrances of my family on both sides.

But you could have had something as lovely as this somewhere else if you had wanted?

If I had wanted, yes. As I said, I had my mother's house in Rome, and a number of things I have here are from that house, including her bed, which was made in Florence of enameled bronze. But I preferred to bring those things here because I didn't want to have two houses. I've always felt that way. I never even had a summer house at Varadero Beach, as so many Cubans had. I always preferred to go to a hotel, to Kawama. My home is special. I like everything to be very orderly and spick and span, and I could not manage two or three houses.

Anyway, my memories are here, and I like my home. I've had the opportunity since I was very young to live very well. I have traveled a great deal and, here in my country, attended receptions for the King of Belgium and the Duchess of Alba — that sort of thing. Clothes interest me very little, but my mother had twenty-nine dresses made for her by Christian Dior. He even made slacks for her — not for anyone else, only for her. And he had lunch here at my house every day when he came to Cuba to open El Encanto, because my mother was in Europe. What I am saying is that I've lived very well, so why should I go looking for anything anywhere else? And when you leave your country, you are always a foreigner.

This is my country. My grandfather fought for it, and we have everything here. So why should I go? Because we have a Communist government? I respect it, and that's that. But I'm as Cuban as the next. That's how I feel. Why should I run away?

You know, I can't understand people who have left their country, their homes, their history, the things of their families to go to Miami still thinking of coming-out parties in which the 'debutante' changes her dress fifteen times in one evening, and that sort of thing. I never had a coming-out party because my grandmother thought they were very vulgar and pretentious. We went to Europe twice a year, but I had only two new dresses a year. I remember that one of them was usually velvet or velveteen with a lace collar. Those people have lost everything, but they are still competing about cars and clothes and coming-out parties. Everything with them is competition, competition. I can't understand that. They haven't progressed. Nobody has a career. Even Yayo's two sons by his two earlier marriages haven't studied.

Another thing, Chinie. You're a Catholic, you were raised a Catholic, you have a strong faith evidently. Have you ever felt that that was endangered here?

No. I always went to church, and no one ever said anything to me. I have that Christ sculpted by Vergulia that my mother bought years ago. I always have a candle lit to it and, once when the Security people were here for two full days, I never put out the candle, and they didn't try to take it away from me. But, you know, I feel you have to stand up for your rights.

Obviously, you're a brave woman, but I've heard people here say, "I'm afraid that if I do this or that, they'll do this or that to me." Do you think a lot of that is just in their own mind?

Well, I think, maybe, if you do something in politics, they'll probably catch you and you will have to pay for it. But not because you are a believer. For instance, when my husband was arrested, they asked if I believed in God and I said, "Yes. I'm a Catholic and I believe in God." They were searching my house for two whole days, and I never put out the candle! That's why I say I believe you have to stand up for your principles.

Stand up for your principles and show that you're an honest person.

Yes, because I never do anything illegal or that I know is prohibited or wrong. As I say, I obey the laws as I would in any country. I was raised that way and it has given me good results. What is more, if you're a Communist or a Mohammedan or whatever, I respect your right to be that — in politics or religion. I think education teaches us that, to respect the rights of others. That's how I have always felt and how I have acted.

Do you ever feel isolated here with so many families gone?

No, because we're surrounded by embassies and we have social relations with some diplomatic people and with a few Cubans —perhaps twenty in all, at most. Most of them are doctors and their wives. Yayo's health hasn't been good for some years and so we've gotten to know his doctors very well and, in some cases, become friends.

Also, we have a parabolic antenna, so we receive programs from abroad and know what's happening in the world. That's mostly our entertainment at night — that and reading and listening to music, which we love. We never go out at night. We used to go out occasionally to diplomatic dinners, but now I don't go because I don't like the majority of the people I find there. Their manners are terrible, and I think they go just to stuff themselves with food. It's embarrassing.

But in fact, they're no worse than the people we found in Miami last year. I was shocked at the obesity of so many, and the way they ate, the mountains of food! At a Christmas Eve dinner, I thought of the poor people with their limited rations in Cuba and I couldn't eat at all. It made me sick.

Have you suffered at all, would you say, by staying here, even with a government that you, perhaps, don't necessarily support?

Well, I'll tell you. I have suffered because of the problems that Yayo has had, of course. But with me, they have always been extremely courteous. I'm sure they know perfectly well that I have never tried to do any "funny business." I think you have to have principles. And if you are clean, why should you be afraid?

The last time my husband was imprisoned —in 1976—they came to search the house, as I mentioned. I had eleven Alfas ¹⁰ outside and thirteen men in the house. They searched everything for two days. They took down every picture, every oil painting, and six men went through all those books, page by page, for two days! And they left empty-handed. I told them, "You are mistaken about me. If I have stayed here, it's to live correctly. I will never be involved in anything, because I could live just as well outside of the country."

That was when your husband was accused of being a spy?

Of being head of the CIA in Cuba!

Do you want to talk about that?

I don't, really. It was all very painful, and why remember the disagreeable things? I prefer to try to think positively, and to ask for more Christian patience.

Could we just go back to your grandson a moment? How did you feel about his going to a Cuban school under a Marxist-Leninist government?

We had always tutored him a great deal at home and wanted to send him to a good prep school in England, but by that time, there were so many problems with drugs in other countries...My mother had already died and my aunt, too, and I was afraid to send him alone because I had no one, really, to watch over him. So we decided to wait until he was older. When he finished high school, he took the entrance examination for law school at Havana University, and they gave him the mark of Excellent, but then he wasn't admitted. I think, as usual, it was a problem of envy.

Did he feel different from the other students in his school?

Yes. Sometimes, I said, "Carlos Manuel, why don't you invite some of your friends from the school?" And he would answer, "Mamá, they're so ordinary." And the few times he invited one or two for lunch, they had no manners, poor things. For instance, they ate meat and chicken with their hands! But of course, they hadn't had the advantages my grandson had.

He called you Mamá?

Yes, because we raised him, as I said, and he is like a son to us.

Is he your only grandchild?

No, but he's my only grandson. I have three granddaughters who are already married. They live with their mother in Baracoa¹¹, but we aren't very close...(*Chinie's voice saddened as she spoke*.) My older daughter always took her father's side, and he encouraged her to be against me. He made a mess of it. So she is totally different from me.

Your grandson, of course, doesn't bear the Tarafa name.

No. His name is Carlos Manuel Sánchez Govea. His father, Orlando Sánchez, who died here two years ago of a heart attack, was the brother of Celia Sánchez, as I told you, although he wasn't at all revolutionary.

Orlando always told the boy, "You have to love your grandparents because, although Yayo is not your father, he has been a father to you."

Were you never worried that he might become a revolutionary or a Marxist while he was in school here?

No, we didn't worry about that because, as I said, we want him to be whatever he wants to be. But actually, he played polo and was on the polo team, but he was also the class monitor in Marxist-Leninist philosophy! The head of the school said, "The only *rich boy* in the Martínez Villena High School and the monitor of Marxism-Leninism!"

Did he choose that himself?

No, he was simply the best student in the subject. I don't say this because he's my husband, but Yayo is a very intelligent and cultured man, and he won a prize for Marxism-Leninism while he was at the university, so he was able to help Carlos with his studies. I suppose most of the other students didn't have that possibility.

Now, in Canada, Carlos has been working in construction and in a moving agency while he waits to be able to begin his studies. I think that's very good for him. It will make a man of him, and it will help him to know what a dollar is worth.

Dusk had fallen as we talked, and it was time to end the interview. As we rose to go, Chinie invited us out for a view of the grounds from the rear terrace. Leaving the sitting room, we paused a moment before a small table holding large, silver-framed photographs of two women. Both were slender and attractive, but the one on the left was extraordinarily beautiful. That is my mother, Laura Tarafa, Chinie said, following our gaze, and the other is her sister, Graciela. Mother was almost fifty when that was taken. When we commented on her beauty, Chinie nodded. She was very beautiful, and elegant in a kind of ethereal way. Whenever she entered a room or a restaurant or anywhere, people turned to stare at her. Graciela wasn't really beautiful, but she had lovely eyes.

From the magnificent terrace, a walk leads some twenty meters down a terraced slope to an ample swimming pool and bathhouses, and all around are well-trimmed trees, shrubs, flowers and great expanses of lawn. "It's easy to see why you wouldn't want to leave," we said.

(She nodded.) Yet others who had nice homes, too, left. But as I told you, it isn't just the house. Everything I have is here —my memories, my family history. What significance would they have in another country? This is my country, and I have no desire to leave it.

NOTES.

- ¹ Bayamo, a small city in eastern Cuba, noted for its people's heroic gesture of burning their city to the ground to prevent its capture by Spanish forces in the Ten Years' War.
- ² Celia Sánchez, considered a heroine of the Cuban Revolution, personal assistant to Fidel Castro in the struggle in the Sierra Maestra mountains and later, until her death from cancer in 1981.
- ³ Camilo Cienfuegos, a top *Comandante* of the Revolution, whose airplane disappeared at sea during a storm.
- ⁴ caballería, a Spanish land measure equal to approximately 33-1/3 acres.
- ⁵ Gerardo Machado, Cuban President and dictator during the 1930s, overthrown by a popular uprising.
- ⁶ tinajones, very large earthenware jars used in gardens to keep rain water, typical of the Cuban province of Camaguey.
- ⁷ Ten Years' War (1868-1878), initiated by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, in which Cubans fought for the Island's independence against vastly superior numbers of Spanish troops.
- 8 manzana, the equivalent of a city block.
- ⁹ Raúl Castro, head of the Cuban Armed Forces, brother of Fidel Castro.
- ¹⁰ Alfa Romeos, Italian-made automobiles used for some time by the Cuban security forces.
- 11 Baracoa, a beach near Havana

EMILIA DEL CAMPO

Emilia del Campo, known as Lili to family and friends since her earliest childhood, is most appropriately named, for del Campo means "of the countryside", and Lili is, in her deepest essence, a woman of the land. Still healthy and attractive at 70, her refined voice and manners contrast strongly with the work-roughened hands that rest in her lap as we converse.

A half-hour's drive from the center of Havana had brought us on this cool January afternoon of 1994 to two large, decaying concrete columns marking the entrance to the del Campo farm. The stark and lonely-looking columns that evidently once supported an iron gate seem to epitomize the farm's general air of abandon. The long driveway leads to a rotunda lying in front of a large, well-built farmhouse, now in some need of paint. With its red-tiled roof and nine arcades across its ample front terrace, the house creates a distinct impression of Spain. A tall cedar tree stands in the center of the rotunda. At the moment of our arrival, two well-kept-looking automobiles were parked beyond the rotunda in front of the house.

To the left of the driveway stands another, smaller, white stucco house, and there Lili stood waiting for us at the gate of her riotously flowering garden. She welcomed us and led us to her front porch, where we sat in white rocking chairs and ate coconut cake (made by Lili) and sipped from tall glasses of grapefruit juice brought out to us by a pretty, dark-haired young woman whom Lili introduced as her daughter-in-law. Protesting that nothing "especially interesting" had ever happened to her, Lili nevertheless acceded charmingly to answering any questions we wanted to ask.

Let's begin with your family background.

Well, my grandfather was Nicanor del Campo. His name is well known in Havana because a whole neighborhood is named after him. That isn't the official name; it's just that people were accustomed to associating the neighborhood with him and called it that. The official name is the one my grandfather himself gave it: Reparto Almendares.

He came to Cuba from Spain as a Spanish functionary during the colonial period. He prospered here and married a Cuban woman, my grandmother, and stayed here, as many Spaniards did, after Cuba won its independence from Spain.

Did he fight on the Spanish side during Cuba's wars of independence?

He didn't actually fight in the war, but he was a Lieutenant in what was called the *Voluntarios*. Those were Spaniards residing in Cuba who helped the Spanish side without actually being in the army. Anyway, as I say, he stayed here and prospered. He had a tile factory and, with his profits from that, he bought up suburban farm land that he later urbanized and that became the Reparto Almendares when Havana expanded out that far some years later, just as he had expected it would. He was a man of vision. He also bought farmland out here and expected that the time would come when the city would spread out this far. Later, he used this land to start a dairy farm. It was a fine dairy, called El Mayor, one of the two in Havana that produced pasteurized and homogenized milk and had a mechanized milking system. Of course, it had the competition of

the Ward Company, a big U.S. dairy business here that made ice cream and other milk products and was much larger than the Cuban dairies.

How much land did he have out here?

Twelve *caballerías*¹ originally. But with the Agrarian Reform laws of the Revolution, we were left with just this tiny farm of about one hectare and another parcel of about four hectares on the other side of the highway.

I know of some people who still have five *caballerías* and more. Why was your grandfather not allowed to keep that much land? Was it because he was Spanish, a foreigner?

No. My grandfather had died years before the Revolution, in 1941. The land and the dairy had been inherited by my father, who was Cuban. The Government nationalized the dairy and pasture lands for a big cattle-breeding and artificial- insemination center and then they needed more of our land to build the Niña Bonita Dam, so they simply expropriated it.

Were you paid for it?

Well, they paid us for it, but the problem is that we didn't want to sell! Anyway, we had no choice, and at least they left us the three houses and the little bit of land around them that we have.

Which is the third house?

You can see it from the highway just before you turn into our driveway. You know, they built the highway right across our land and now the third house is separated from us by the highway.

Did your grandfather build that house, too?

No, it was built by one of my uncles, my father's youngest brother.

Can you tell us something about your parents?

My father was Cuban, as I said, and my mother was Spanish.

How did they meet?

They met in Spain. Although my grandfather Nicanor had married a Cuban woman, he wanted his sons to marry Spanish women, so when my father and his older brother were of marriageable age, my grandfather took his whole family to Spain on a visit. He appeared in his home town with his wife and six children — three boys and three girls, his chauffeur and a new Lincoln car. (*Lili smiled*.) That's what I call an *aldeanada* — typical of a villager! Anyway, the two older boys met Spanish girls and eventually married them. So that's how my father met my mother.

She was the daughter of a well-to-do Oviedo family, but the family had suffered financial reverses and, at the time that my father met her, she was working in the local telegraph office. It was very unusual for a young woman of good family to hold a job at that time, but she faced the situation and went out to work. She was very, very pretty, and my father fell in love with her at first sight. Later, she gained weight and became quite fat, but she always had a very pretty face.

They weren't married immediately because my father had to finish his last two years at the university. My grandfather insisted that his three sons get university degrees, so one became a lawyer, another an architect, and my father graduated as a pharmacist, although he never practiced it. Anyway, they were married in 1922, and I was born a year later.

What was your childhood like?

As a child, I was always rather solitary and, often, melancholy. I loved animals, as I still do, and I loved being here at the farm, doing the things my brothers did. But during the school months I had to live "in the Reparto," as we always called it, which meant in my grandparents' house in Almendares, since there were no schools out here in the country. That was, and is, a

very big house, actually a mansion, and from there I was taken to school in a very special way that I think many of the other girls in my school probably envied. I went in a very pretty wicker coach drawn by two horses, driven by a coachman, of course.

I liked going to school in my wicker coach, but I hated getting to school! I never enjoyed schools or lessons, except the English lessons that my two brothers and I received at home from an Irish governess we had. I also liked to read, and I read a lot.

Why did you have an Irish governess? Because she was Catholic?

I don't know. That may have been the reason. I was never told. We were very fond of her, but I never learned to pronounce her last name. For us, she was just Miss May.

What school did you attend?

It was a private Catholic school, the Ursulinas, but the problem wasn't with the school. I wouldn't have liked any school. I only wanted to be at the farm. I'm a Taurus, and that probably explains my feeling about animals and the land.

What happened to your wicker coach?

In the late 1930s, my grandfather was affected, like everyone else, by the Great Depression. He had been a multimillionaire, and he lost a great deal. Later, he managed to recover some of his fortune, but he was no longer the largest contributor in the municipality of Marianao.

Do you mean he was no longer the largest tax-payer?

Yes, exactly. He had always been very proud of that. But it was during that bad period that he sold the wicker coach and, even, the two ponies. They were two beautiful little mares that my grandfather had bought for my brother Manolín and me. One was golden color and the other pinto, and I loved them very much. I cried for nights on end when he sold them, not because of the coach but because of the ponies.

Had you or your brothers ridden the ponies?

Oh, yes. I rode almost every day, and Manolín some days.

Where did you ride?

At my grandparents' house. There were stables, and we rode in the park that surrounded the house. At that time, their house was the only one there. All the rest of the block was a woods, and my grandfather had had bridle paths made through the woods for us.

What about your brothers? Where did they live during school terms?

When my brother Manolín, who is just two years younger than I, was small, he stayed at our grandparents' house, too, and we both went to school in the coach I told you about. But when my second brother started school, both he and Manolín were sent to a Catholic boarding school for boys. They went first to the La Salle School but later changed to Belén because a cousin of my mother's, a Spanish priest, Father Galán, came to teach there. Belén was considered the best boys' school in Cuba.

And when did you see your parents?

I was with my parents and my brothers on some weekends and during school holidays and, sometimes, my parents came into Havana and stayed at my grandparents' house. They had their own room there. My father was my grandfather's favorite son, perhaps because he was the one who most gave in to his whims, because my grandfather was very domineering. From the time my father was small, he was the one who always accompanied my grandfather everywhere. They went hunting together. But my father was also very responsible. My grandfather, as I told you, owned a tile factory, and when my father was just thirteen years old, he was in charge of the

dynamite at his father's factory. And once when there was a strike at the factory and a worker started to throw bricks at my grandfather, my father stopped the strike by confronting the workers with a revolver and shooting into the air. Then, when my grandfather started the dairy business, my father was put in charge of it and the farm.

Anyway, as I say, I spent much more time with my grandparents than with my parents. My grandparents were very good to me. I was the first grandchild and they doted on me. But I was also their godchild, and great importance used to be given to that relationship here.

They took me out for drives in the afternoon and to the beach and to the circus. That I loved. Oh, and when I was small, they took me to Spain with them. We were there only six months, but when we returned, I spoke with a Spanish accent. I remember how furious it made me when the cook at my grandmother's house made fun of my accent, and I refused to speak for a long time. My mother spoke with a Spanish accent all her life, and I detested it because it was different from the way other people spoke.

Did you have a good relationship with your mother in spite of that?

Oh, yes. But I was very spoiled, and she had no patience with that. I was also a rather sullen child, because I wasn't really happy. It's a mistake for children to be raised by their grandparents if their parents are living. It creates resentments and differences between brothers and sisters. So in the Reparto, I was a princess, but here at the farm, I was a Cinderella. And all of that made me very unhappy because this was where I wanted to be. (*Lili laughed*.) So I was a little girl who seemed to have everything to make me happy, and yet I wasn't.

Poor little rich girl?

In a way. But I don't regret anything that's happened to me — the good and the bad. I don't regret it. It's all part of experience, and I think I'm quite strong.

What about servants? Were there many servants at your grandparents' house or here at the farm?

At my grandparents' house, there were nine. And they were very well-treated. Some of them were practically adopted by my grandmother. Here at the farm, there were five originally, but my mother disliked having servants. She always quoted Mother Teresa, saying that a servant is an enemy in the house — because they inevitably feel envy. So she said that when you open the door to a servant, you open it to an enemy.

What kind of social life did you have as a girl?

When I was in my teens, it mostly revolved around the Casino Español, a private club for Spaniards and their descendants. They had a large building for dances and coming-out parties and other social affairs in downtown Havana and also a beach club at Marianao Beach near the Havana Yacht Club. I still wasn't very sociable, but I went sometimes, and it was there that I met my husband, a Spaniard named Gerardo González.

We were married soon after. I was just 19 and he was 24. We had four children, three boys and a girl, who are all grown and have children of their own now. (*Lili laughed and spread her hands.*) And that's the story of my life. You see, I told you it wasn't very interesting.

Do you consider that your life ended when you married and had children?

(She laughed again.) No, no. I just don't want to bore you with my very ordinary adult life.

Did you live with your grandparents until you married?

Yes. And after I married, too. My grandmother was a widow by then, because my grandfather died in 1941. She gave us a house as a wedding gift, but she begged us to stay with her because she couldn't bear to be separated from me. It was a tragedy for her. So I rented out the house she'd given me, and we lived with her. Later, after my daughter was born, I wanted to build my

own house. So my father gave me a lot that my grandfather had left him on the corner of the same block as my grandmother's house, and we built there. The family owned the whole block and my aunts and uncles and cousins lived all around us by then. They had all inherited properties when my grandfather died, and so they were very comfortable.

Tell us something about your husband.

He was my opposite. Very gregarious. He was the son of a Spanish *comisionista* who represented different foreign firms in Cuba, and my husband went into his father's business. Because of the nature of his work, we had to entertain and travel a lot. I usually accompanied him on his trips, but I didn't really enjoy it. I went with him to Mexico and different places in the States — Texas, Kansas, New York very often. If we'd visited theaters or museums in New York, I'd probably have enjoyed it more, but Gerardo was only interested in going to fancy restaurants and cabarets — El Morocco and places like that. So in general, I preferred to remain in Cuba.

Did he object to that?

Oh, yes. We had frequent quarrels about it. Then, here in Havana, it was the same thing. We had to be entertaining clients constantly, going to restaurants, cabarets, Varadero. I enjoyed those things more or less when we went alone or with friends, but not with clients, especially when I had to be telephoning home to know if one of the children's fever had risen, etc.

Then, in 1954, my husband lost his business. He had to declare bankruptcy and lost everything. He'd never been a good businessman, really. He'd lived a kind of fantasy, and when the bubble burst, everything collapsed.

We had to cut back on everything, reduce our expenses to a minimum. This may seem strange, but when I learned that he had lost everything, I was actually glad. Yes. In the midst of the tragedy, I was glad it had happened, because it meant that we would be forced to adopt a different life style and that I'd be able to live quietly, as I liked.

So we sold our house and built this very modest house here at the farm and moved here. Gerardo started helping my father in the dairy business, doing all kinds of things, even driving a dairy truck! Then, finally, he took over the accounting, and by the time the government intervention came in 1963 to build the breeding and insemination center and the dam I told you about, he was managing the farm and the dairy business.

Was your husband unhappy here?

No, not really. He was a well-educated man, but he adapted to doing whatever had to be done — even, as I say, to driving a dairy truck at the beginning.

And I began to grow things. My maternal grandmother came from Spain to live with my parents, and she had a wonderful hand for making and cultivating vegetable gardens. She started a fine garden here and she taught me, and I've been growing all kinds of vegetables ever since. Then I started breeding animals — goats, turkeys, ducks, chickens. I had so many hens that I was able to start selling eggs and soon I had a very good egg business going. People paid me good prices for them. I had incubators and all of the equipment, and it was quite a good business.

Do you still sell eggs?

No, no. Now I only raise animals for our own use.

Why did you stop your egg business?

Well, because the government prohibited private businesses.

Were your parents still living at the time of the expropriation?

Yes, both of them.

What was their reaction?

Well, you can imagine! It was terrible. At the same time, it's curious, but after a time, my father seemed to accept it better than my mother. I remember that some architect friends came to visit us once. They were doing some work on the Niña Bonita project and were describing to my father what was being done there in artificial insemination of cattle, and he was interested! They offered to take him on a tour of the whole project and he accepted, but in the end, his health was too bad by then and he never went.

Did you consider leaving the country at that time or later?

We talked of it, but neither my parents nor I wanted to leave, really. Gerardo's father was living in Spain, but he hadn't helped us when Gerardo lost his business, and Gerardo said he wouldn't go to Spain where he would have to depend on his father. My mother absolutely refused to leave. She said she had come to this country as a queen and she would not leave it as a beggar. She said she would die here in her own house. And she did.

When did your parents die?

My father in 1971 and my mother in 1973.

And who lives in your parents' house across the way now?

My younger brother, Nicanor, and his family. My other brother, Manolín, left Cuba and is living in Miami now. He has entrepreneurial instincts like his grandfather, but there isn't much room for that here nowadays.

Is your husband still living?

No. He died four years ago of a heart attack. Now I live here with one of my sons, César, a teacher, his wife and their little girl, Marcia, my granddaughter.

What about your other children? What are they doing?

Both of my other sons are gregarious, like their father, and they've both taken up careers in sports and physical education, as teachers. My daughter is more introspective, like me. She's a psychologist and works for the Ministry of Public Health. She has a ten-year-old son, but she's divorced now and so she and Claudio, her son, are often here. They live in the third house I mentioned, over on the other side of the highway.

Do you grow most of your own food here?

Yes. Most of it. At the beginning I also grew ornamental plants and sold them, but now I only take care of the plants in the front garden and grow food for the family — mostly vegetables and root crops, but some beans and corn, too. I greatly miss having flour and other ingredients to bake with, but of course, I can't grow wheat.

Do you actually cultivate the land yourself?

Oh, yes. I dig and plant and transplant and water and weed and, of course, harvest most of what I plant. But, as I told you, my son César lives here and helps me on weekends with the heavier jobs.

Do you go into Havana often?

Rarely. Almost never.

And you don't feel very isolated here?

No. I have enough family around me here, and we have radio and television. I do miss a telephone. When the highway was built, our telephone lines were torn down, and they've never been restored.

What happened to your grandparents' house in "El Reparto"?

My younger son lives there now.

So that house is still in the family?

Yes, it is, but I have no desire to live there.

Would you say that you have bad memories of that house?

No. Not at all. It's only that I live here, where I've always wanted to be.

What happened to your grandfather's other sons and daughters? Did they remain in Cuba after the Revolution or did they leave?

No. None of them left. They all died here. But the children of Nicanor, the only one who had children besides my father, left after the Revolution.

Lili, do you ever feel bitter about your children having such a different and more difficult life than you had?

Oh, yes. Every now and then. Especially now, when things are far worse than they've ever been before. But of course, the life we had before didn't guarantee happiness, either. In some ways, I'm happier now than I was during much of my life.

What about your children? Do they feel bitter?

I think that what my grandfather and my family had seems to them like a kind of fairy tale, and they say that they have to live in the real world. And that's true, you know.

Were you born here at the farm?

No. We were all born in my grandparents' house, so that my mother could be near the doctor.

But you were most probably conceived here at the farm?

Probably.

Then perhaps your return could be called a "return to the seed" in a double sense, since you've returned to the place where you were conceived and you've also, literally, returned to the earth — to seeds and planting.

(Lili nodded and smiled.) Yes. I like that idea.

NOTES:

¹ caballería, approximately 33 1/3 acres.

CELIA PONCE DE LEON

When we first met Cuqui in 1976, she was a lovely woman in her 60s whose gracious, almost leisurely manner belied her extremely active life as a TV director and university student. We met in the living room of her simple, high-ceilinged, colonial-type home in the Vedado residential section of Havana where, following brief inspection and somewhat begrudging acceptance by Fru-fru and Canchi, Cuqui's two anxiously panting, white poodles, we got into our first question.

We'd like you to tell us something about your family history.

Well, it's Cuban — all the way back. And before that, Spanish. The Ponce de Leóns have been involved with Puerto Rico and Cuba since the time of the Discovery. The first one, Juan Ponce de León, came to America with Columbus on the Admiral's second voyage and was the *conquistador* and first Governor of Puerto Rico, as well as the discoverer of Florida, of course.

Was your ancestor really searching for the "Fountain of Youth," as our history books tell us, or is that merely a legend?

It's probably true. I think people believed in almost anything in those days. Imagine! They'd just found an exotic continent, rich in gold and silver, whose existence no one had even remotely imagined. If that existed, anything might be true! It must have been very easy for the *conquistadores* to believe the natives' stories about a fountain of eternal youth. But I suppose his main purpose was the conquest of Florida and its possible riches and that the search for the 'fountain' was only secondary.

Can you tell us more about the family?

I haven't a complete record, and perhaps none exists. In the late 16th and the 17th century, the period of the conquests of Mexico and Peru, so many Spaniards who had settled in Cuba went off to seek their fortunes with Pizarro, Cortés and the others, that there were times when Cuba was almost depopulated of men. In that period, Havana and other Cuban ports were repeatedly sacked and burned by pirates and corsairs, so that it's really only from the 18th century that most records exist. There was a Marqués de Aguas Claras and a Conde de Arcos, both descendants of the Ponce de León line. The mansions they built in colonial times still stand in Old Havana, one in Cathedral Square and the other just off the Square, and nowadays, of course, they're points of tourist interest.

One of my great-grandfathers was Antonio Bachiller Morales¹.

The first revolutionary in our family, to my knowledge, was my grandfather, Néstor Ponce de León, a lawyer and writer and one of the supporters and financiers of Cuba's Ten Years' War against Spain led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes². The Spanish Government finally condemned him to death for his revolutionary activities, and he had to flee the country. All of his property was expropriated, including two sugar mills in the province of Matanzas and a personal library that was considered the finest in Cuba, but he managed to escape to New York and there formed

part of the *Junta Revolucionaria*, as its Secretary-Treasurer, and continued to help obtain money and supplies for the war against Spain.

Later, in our Second War of Independence, he was an intimate friend of José Martí³ and, again, helped to finance the struggle for independence. After the war, when Cuba was finally free of the Spanish, he returned and became head of the National Archives until his death in 1899.

My father was a child when his parents fled to New York, so that he grew up in that city. Meanwhile, my maternal grandmother and her sister had also had to leave Cuba because of the war and the occupation of their native city of Camaguey by Spanish troops. (My grandmother's sister was the wife of Ignacio Agramonte⁴. She was the "Beloved Amalia" of Agramonte's letters.) My grandmother went first to Mexico, where my mother was born, and later to New York, so that both my mother and my father grew up in New York City and met there. When the war ended in 1898, the exiled families returned to Cuba, and my parents were married here.

So there were Cuban exiles in the United States in the last century as there are now?

Yes. But the difference is that those of the last century were revolutionaries, while the present ones are mostly counterrevolutionaries.

How many children did your parents have?

Only my sister and me...two daughters.

Then you are the end of the Ponce de León line?

No, because there are lots of other Ponce de Leóns — cousins I don't even know in most cases. There are black Ponce de Leóns, too, because the Marqués de Aguas Claras had a son who married his father's slave. He had eleven children, and it's that branch of the family that carries the titles of nobility.

Do they still have them?

Yes, of course. The titles are hereditary. That happened in the 18th century and, of course, that branch has since spread all over the Island and perhaps elsewhere, too. I only know one of that line, but I haven't seen him for years.

Can you tell us something about your own childhood and your life-style before the Revolution of 1959?

My childhood was uneventful, warm, protected. My parents didn't have much money, since their families' properties had all been lost in our wars of independence, but we lived comfortably. I was educated at a Catholic school, the American Dominican Academy. At school, I participated in all the plays, acting and directing. I also studied dancing at a fashionable dancing academy and danced in practically every benefit performance — interpretive dancing, soft-shoe ballet. When my sister and I were younger, our parents took us regularly to concerts and to the ballet, and created a life-long habit of concert and ballet-going.

As we grew up, my sister and I became "social butterflies" as the Society columns in the newspapers called us. We had an active club life. Social life in Cuba revolved around the exclusive private clubs. We played tennis, swam, danced. We'd go to the Vedado Tennis Club in the morning, to the Yacht Club in the afternoon or evening. Horseback riding. Tea at the Country Club. That sort of life. Pleasant but quite pointless.

Then, after I graduated from school, I married into a very wealthy family and kept up the same kind of life. My first husband was a tennis champion, so we played tennis a lot...

We had two daughters and, some time afterward, I started working, as a hobby, in the theater, producing and directing plays for the *Patronato del Teatro*. That was a group of theater patrons who loved the theater and got together and produced plays. It was amateur theater, of course, and I never dreamed then that I'd ever earn my living in the theater. But I loved directing, and soon it

became my passion. I started to read books and study everything I could about it. I went to New York every year and, of the thirty or more days I'd spend there, at least twenty of them I'd be at the theater.

What sort of plays did you present?

All kinds. British, French, Spanish...a lot of American plays, including musical comedies.

South Pacific? Oklahoma?

No, those came later. By then, I was working in television. I divorced my husband in 1948 and, shortly afterward, I had the chance to go into television — producing and directing — but as a means of earning my living, not as a hobby!

How did you go about it? Did you just transfer your knowledge and experience in the theater to the new medium?

Yes, in part. But also I'd bought several books in New York on television programming and directing. That was when TV was just being introduced into Cuba, and about a month before we started, the owner of Channel 4 took a group of us to New York to visit all the studios and there we saw in practice what we'd read about. Then we came back and began producing our own programs and, soon, I was doing everything — dramatic shows, fashion shows, even sports shows.

Is that what you were doing when the revolutionary government took power?

No. I stayed in television before the Revolution for about seven years and then realized that I needed a rest. I had remarried, and my work was taking up too much of my time...Also, I'd been working very long hours because, after my divorce, I wanted my daughters to go on studying in the very expensive private schools they attended, but I wanted to be independent of my exhusband and finance their education myself. To do that, I'd been working l4 hours a day. I had my normal working hours and, besides that, I made films and documentaries often until midnight or 2 A.M. because each film I made meant more money.

So, after seven years of that, I decided I needed a long vacation. I started to study painting at an art school — just because I've always liked painting as a hobby — and I also took a very undemanding job as an Inspector of Special English-Language Night Schools for the Ministry of Education. That's what I was doing when the revolutionary victory took place in 1959.

Then what happened?

Well, I immediately lost my job.

Why was that?

The entire government structure — which had been tremendously corrupt — was reorganized, including the Ministry of Education, and only those who had a teaching degree were kept on as Inspectors. I had none, so I and many others were let go.

You weren't offered another job?

No, but something else happened. I was offered retirement! Some time later...I was already working in the theater again by then...I suddenly received a check one day for three thousand pesos. There was no covering letter, and I couldn't imagine what it was for, so I went to the Ministry of Labor and asked about it. The person who received me asked if I was retired, and I said no. Then he asked if I had ever worked for the Government, and when I said I'd been a School Inspector, he said, "Ah, yes. This is the back payment on your retirement, and you are now entitled to receive a monthly retirement check." They had retired all the School Inspectors who'd been let go, apparently complying with some law.

I told him that I was working and didn't want to retire and probably would never retire, so I returned the check, and that was that.

Can you tell us something about your first husband's background?

Well, he was very rich. He was the heir to a tobacco fortune. His father was a German who came to Cuba and started the H. Upmann Tobacco Company that became known all over the world.

Do you want to talk about the reasons for your divorce?

It was just that we didn't get along together. He's a very nice fellow. Very, very nice, and we've remained good friends. But he was an only child and very spoiled. And...we found as we matured that we had completely different interests. He practiced sports and enjoyed horse races and gambling but didn't care anything about concerts or theater or the things that I loved. So we had nothing in common except the children. Then, too, we lived with his mother who was very domineering, and we didn't get along well. I stood the situation for about thirteen years for the sake of the children, then decided that I had to have my own life. I was sure that I could get a job and stand on my own feet, and I did. That was when I started to work in television, and I was soon earning 600 pesos a month, which was a very good salary for a woman in Cuba then.

Has your first husband remained in Cuba?

Oh, yes. He's here and very much a part of the Revolution.

Did he sympathize with the Revolution from the beginning?

Yes, entirely. He lost a great deal from a monetary point of view, of course, since he was the only heir to the family fortune, but he's not the kind of person who cares about that. He was Treasurer of the family business when it was nationalized, and all the top officials were told they were no longer needed. We were divorced by then, but he had remarried, so he wrote a letter stating that he had a family and needed to work and that he was willing to take any job in which he could be useful. So they gave him his job back. He changed to another job later and continued to work until he retired a few years ago.

He's always been athletic and strong, and he used to do voluntary work at the docks, like Che Guevara, helping to unload ships! Well, we've all done a lot of voluntary work! I've even cut sugarcane in the country and done kitchen duty at a construction-brigade camp! But I've never worked at the docks.

Is your ex-mother-in-law still living?

No, she died five or six years ago. After our divorce, she adored me! Later, when her son was going to remarry, I had to convince her — and my daughters — that it was perfectly all right for him to marry again. Then, when his second wife was going to have a child, his mother declared that her grandchildren would only be my daughters. It was amusing. After his other marriages, I became "the best" daughter-in-law. But both of his other wives and I get along very well.

How did your ex-mother-in-law accept the Revolution?

She wasn't happy about it because, of course, she lost a lot. She had a lot of money and she managed a lot of money. She'd invested part of her husband's fortune in apartment buildings and office buildings; she owned a supermarket, etc. and she had an income of thousands of dollars a month. So she didn't like it when the Revolution reduced her income to \$600 a month, which is the maximum that one is allowed to earn from rents. And of course, all her businesses were nationalized. But by then she was quite old and, in fact, she lived very simply, so she didn't suffer any hardship. Besides, she had plenty of money in the bank and was able to keep that.

Her husband never saw the Revolution?

No, he died when my ex-husband was a little boy. I never met him.

You say that you and your ex-husband have remained friends. Do you ever comment together on the tremendous change that has taken place in your lives under the Revolution?

No. We both find everything perfectly natural. Perhaps it seems remarkable for outsiders, for people who aren't Cuban, but for us it seems perfectly normal. We aren't the first Cubans who have made sacrifices for the good of the country. Many others — starting back more than a hundred years ago — made much greater sacrifices. So we don't think we've done anything extraordinary by staying here and helping the Revolution....The thing is that we care more about the advancement of our country and its people than about any personal comfort or advantage.

It used to be so humiliating, for example, to see Cubans begging, and we used to have so many beggars in this country — even children! There was poverty everywhere, and almost all of our people living in rural areas and the mountains were illiterate because there were no schools. But as an individual, you couldn't do anything about it. Charity organizations weren't enough. They were a drop of water in the sea. And there just didn't seem to be any way to solve the real problems.

Now, it makes me feel fine to see so many young people at the university and everybody in the whole country with the opportunity to work and study and develop their talent. It's beautiful to see this and wonderful to be cooperating in it.

It's true that some of us don't have many of the luxuries we used to have, but we have all that we need, and luxuries aren't necessary. We can live without them. That doesn't mean there aren't things we'd like to have. There are lots of them. But that gives us goals to work toward. For example, this sofa has needed reupholstering for several years, and maybe I'm going to get it done this year. I'm also on a list to replace my old Dodge with a new car this year, and I'm looking forward to that. Those things are very convenient, but they're not fundamental.

Can we talk a little about your political involvement with the Revolution?

I wasn't involved at all before the Revolution. As a matter of fact, I was scared to death every time my younger daughter, Silvia, went out of the house during the Batista period...So many young men and women never returned home alive. And she was doing underground work, passing papers and...I don't know just what she did, but she was going out all the time. She had her own car and was going to the university, the Catholic university, and coming home late at night. I was scared and worried about her all the time. But of course, the whole country was against Batista, and so were we.

I had remarried in 1949, and my second husband and I were very skeptical about Fidel and the other revolutionaries at first. We had been so disillusioned in the past with Cuban politicians and so-called revolutionaries who in the end usually proved to be weak or corrupt and self-seeking. We listened to the rebel broadcasts from the Sierra Maestra and wondered if they would really put their ideas into practice if they ever had the chance. Then, when they came down from the mountains and began to put an Agrarian Reform Law into effect, giving the land to those who worked it, and to prohibit foreign ownership of land and enterprises in Cuba, and to prepare a national literacy campaign, we said, "This is it! It's real."

Did you expect, then, that the Revolution would become Socialist?

No. It never passed through our minds. We weren't sufficiently so-phisticated politically to realize that there would be no other choice.

What was your reaction when the Revolution was declared Socialist?

At first, something of shock; then, on second thought, approval. The radicalization of the Revolution was gradual, and apparently we, like so many other people, had also grown more

radical gradually, observing the measures and countermeasures between the United States government and Cuba. We were in Paris when Fidel announced that Cuba was going to follow the Socialist path, and I remember that my husband and I looked at each other and exclaimed, "Well! And now what?"

How did you happen to be in Paris at that time?

We were touring with a Cuban Dance Group. I was working as stage manager of the Group and my husband had been lent to accompany us as interpreter. He had lived and studied in France for fifteen years and spoke perfect French.

How did the rest of the Group react to the announcement?

Everyone seemed to react more or less as we did — at first, with surprise, then approval. But later, at the end of our tour, two dancers deserted in Germany. Apparently, they hadn't been so sure of their approval, although later they changed their minds and rejoined the Group. In the first few hours, we were all very worried. Several airfields in Cuba had already been bombarded from the air, and we had no doubt that the U.S. would do everything in its power to prevent Socialism from becoming established in any country of America. The situation seemed alarming to say the least. Everyone could only think of getting back to Cuba as soon as possible, but the next night, the manager of our Group told us, "Pack up! We're leaving for Moscow tomorrow morning!"

That hadn't been on your schedule?

No! We'd been scheduled for a tour of western Europe. So when we were told we were leaving for Moscow, we thought, "What in the world is this?" But we decided, "All right. Let's go and see what happens." My husband requested permission to return to Cuba immediately, since he was a *miliciano* and wanted to be on hand for whatever might come. Anyway, we wouldn't be needing a French interpreter in the Soviet Union. So the rest of us departed for Moscow and Joaquín returned to Havana.

What happened to the two dancers who defected?

They came back to Cuba with the Group, and once we arrived, of course, they were detained and questioned, but apparently nothing else happened because they went on working after a short time.

Did they say why they had defected?

Well, they didn't tell me. I don't know if someone got to them and made them offers...I really don't know. It happened just at the end of our tour — in the German Democratic Republic, and it wasn't my responsibility to question them. I was too busy with other things. Besides, lots of people were deserting at that time — scared to death of Socialism, or "Communism," as they called it.

You weren't afraid of it?

At first, I didn't know what I thought about it. I didn't know enough about it, for one thing, to be able to make up my mind. We had certainly heard and read enough negative things all our lives to be completely prejudiced against it, but we had already lived through two years of the Revolution and, since so many people kept saying that everything the Revolution did was "Communist," we had begun to think that maybe Communism was a pretty good thing! We could certainly see, for example, that everything we had been taught in our religion, without its ever having been put into practice, was being put into practice by the Revolution —an end to racism, concern for one's neighbors, sacrifice for the sake of others. And I can tell you that by the time I returned from the Soviet Union, I no longer had any doubts at all. From then on, I had no fear at all of Socialism.

What was it that made you feel that way?

It isn't easy to explain. I think it was seeing how people in the Socialist countries we visited lived and acted — above all, their attitudes. And we fell in love with the Russian people. They were so warm, so sincere, affectionate, wanting to be helpful, and we found this everywhere and at all levels. We attended receptions and met high officials of the Government, even Kruschov! And everyone was the same.

Don't you think those attitudes are due more to cultural tradition than to political system?

I think they're due to the political system because they seemed to be happy people, and we certainly couldn't say that about the French people we'd seen. We met and talked to people in the hotels, theater workers of all kinds — even farmers. We hadn't been expected in the Soviet Union and, since it was summer, the big theaters were closed, so that many of our performances were held in summer theaters in different rural communities, and as a result, we saw parts of the Soviet Union that most visitors never see. Comparing what we saw — the way people lived — with what we had at that time in our own country impressed all of us very, very much. We were very impressed.

I remember one day we were told that a group of people from the United States had arrived at the hotel where we were staying, and when we entered the dining-room that evening, they stood up and began to applaud. That was 1961, and Cuba had just defeated the invasion at Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs, as your newspapers called it). We invited them to the show, and they attended it.

They were progressives?

Of course they were, or they would never have applauded us. But we couldn't help thinking how wonderful it would be if all Americans were like those people.

You were saying that you returned from that trip with no more doubts about Socialism. What about personal freedom? One hears so much about that in relation to Socialism.

Well, what is personal freedom? It depends on what you call freedom. For me, freedom is the right to work, to have the basic necessities of life — a home, the right to study, the opportunity to grow, the right to think freely, to decide what you want to do with your life. I feel as free under the Revolution as I ever did before — in many ways, freer.

How did you happen to return to theater work after you lost your School Inspector job in 1959?

I was at home without working, wondering what to do next, when a friend telephoned one day and asked if I would have time to direct a children's play at the Bellas Artes Museum. I said, "Time! I have nothing but time!"

When she learned I wasn't working, she telephoned the head of the *Teatro Nacional*, who called me the next day and asked me to go see her. At that moment, she didn't need a director, but she desperately needed a stage manager and was sure I could do the job because of all my theater experience. So I took on a new profession and, in early 1961, took this Dance Group to Europe as I told you.

What I really wanted to do, though, and felt happiest doing, was directing. Stage managing was challenging, but it wasn't really my field. Then, when we returned from Europe, I was offered the chance to direct my own theater group, and that was exactly what I wanted. So I started with the Rita Montaner Theater Group and continued with them until 1968. Then I went back to television. Full circle!

Why did you leave the theater group?

Well, I had trained four or five young directors in the six years I was with the Group, so that, finally, I myself was directing very little, and I didn't like that. It seemed immoral to me to be doing only one or two plays a year for the salary I was earning, so I went to see the head of the ICRT⁵ with the idea of filling in with television work during the period I was free in the theater. He proposed that I come to them full time, but I didn't think I wanted to do that; I preferred to try doing both things for a while to see how it worked out. But I found I'd forgotten how satisfying television work was, so after two months, I went back and told him I was ready to stay on. He said, "Fine!" and I've been there ever since.

What sort of programs do you do?

Until last September, I directed the ICR Theatre, presenting one-hour or one-hour-and-a-half adaptations of theater plays. I also did "El Cuento", a program of famous universal short stories translated and adapted for television, and a program called Art TV, sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, which included dance, drama, music of all kinds...

At the moment I'm doing a children's program, and that's very convenient because it ends at 7:30, which allows me to get to my university classes on time. ICR Theatre ended at 9, and I missed a lot of classes.

What are you studying?

History of Art. At the moment, this term, Latin-American Art.

Why are you studying?

I just wanted to. I'd never had time before. I married very young, and in the past no one ever thought of being a married woman and having children and also studying at the university. Now, of course, everybody does it...

Actually, I started after my husband died. It was a very hard time for me, and I decided that the best thing to do was to keep as busy as possible. So I became a university student and, next June, I'll graduate.

Have you enjoyed it?

Yes, although at first I often thought I should drop it. I didn't need it, and it was just extra effort. Besides, at my age...But then I found that many young people had the same idea. They're all workers who study at night, giving up their free time and rest, and often they thought it was too much. Then they'd look at me and think, "Well, if she can do it, we can, too." I know this because many of them have told me they've considered me an example, so for that — more than for anything else — I've continued. And, of course, I've learned a lot.

What will you do after you graduate?

Continue in television.

You won't study anything else?

I don't know. I might go on with French. I learned English at school, but I've never really perfected my French. Or I might take up Italian — just enough to read it. A friend of mine lived in Italy for many years and has a houseful of books I'd love to read.

Do you think you'll ever return to the theater?

No. I expect to continue in television. I'd like to do something related to women next. Television is a lot of hard work and one works under constant tension, but it's fun and stimulating. I want to go on doing it as long as I can.

I had thought I'd miss the theater and want to return to it eventually, but only last week I found out differently. Two Swedish boys who work in theater had been sent to me, and I took them out and introduced them to people. We visited the theaters and watched rehearsals, had long discussions, that sort of thing. And I found out that I didn't miss it at all. I still love the theater, but when you think of the number of people you can reach in just one night on television, there's just no comparison. And I care about reaching the public. I've always cared about that rather than pleasing the critics.

Can you tell us something about your second husband?

His name was Joaquín Agüero. He was from a family of Cuban patriots and landowners in the province of Camagüey. An earlier Joaquín de Agüero, his great-great-grandfather is in our history books because he was executed by the Spanish for leading one of the many Cuban conspiracies against Spain. My husband was a man of broad culture...handsome, charming. I learned a lot from him. In many ways, he was my teacher. (Cuqui indicated a nearby photograph from which an exceptionally good-looking blond man gazed forth serenely.)

How did you meet?

Well, it was odd, in a way. Years before, when I was only 14 or 15, Joaquín's sister came to Havana from Camagüey and stayed at our house for a year or so. We became close friends, and she always used to tell me, "I wish you could meet my brother Joaquín." But he was studying medicine in Paris. When the Second World War broke out, he stayed on and joined the French army and fought in the War until he was taken prisoner. After his release in one of the prisoner-exchanges, he returned to Cuba, but I was married and we never met.

Then one day he saw my photograph in the newspaper in connection with one of the plays we were putting on. It was one I had written.

You haven't said you were also a dramatist.

I'd forgotten until this moment, but I wrote a couple back in the forties. Anyway, Joaquín saw this photograph and clipped it out and carried it in his wallet for several years before we finally met. We were only introduced after my divorce at the wedding of his brother, who happened to be marrying my best friend. He told me then, "I've got a photograph of you." Then he took out his wallet and showed me the photo, all yellow and dog-eared. It was odd, because all those years before, his sister had thought we would get along well. And we did. We definitely did. We had a very happy marriage.

He had no difficulty accepting the Revolution?

None at all. He agreed with it from the beginning, even though he, too, lost his job at first. He simply looked around for something else and then found a new job at the National Archives (that my grandfather and later my father had directed years before). Later, he was named Secretary General of the Academy of Sciences and held that post until his heart attack in 1964. After that, he was an invalid here at home for six years before his death.

As I told you, he was a *miliciano*. He joined the People's Militia as soon as it was formed in 1959 to help defend the Revolution, as I did, too. Then, after the Revolution was declared Socialist, we began to study Marxism together and found that we agreed with that, too. So it was all very easy for us. Very, very easy.

Would you say that you're a Marxist now?

A Marxist-Leninist, yes. I'm certainly not an authority, but I know the fundamental principles and agree with them — especially in regard to public ownership of the means of production and profits being put back into facilities and services for the people.

Backtracking to those plays you wrote, what were they about?

Really, they're both outdated now. One was a takeoff on Cuban society life, a drawing-room comedy that I wrote with a friend on a dare. We'd criticized a play we'd seen, and said we could do something better, so a local critic dared us to try, and we did. About two years later, we wrote another with more serious intentions that dealt with a fairly typical pre-revolutionary situation.

What was the theme?

A husband who spends a lot of time in the interior of the country taking care of his sugarcane plantation, but who has established another household there with another woman. The wife in Havana is aware of the situation but does nothing about it because her education and religious training have taught her to look the other way and be piously resigned. That's what women were taught before the Revolution. She rebels and tries to get a divorce, but in the end, she submits and everything goes on as usual. That would seem ridiculous to women here now, but that was the old Catholic and Spanish tradition! The man could do anything he liked and the woman was supposed to stay at home and accept it. In 1948, when I got a divorce, all kinds of people were scandalized!

(At that moment, a pleasant-looking Afro-Cuban woman brought in a tray with Cuban coffee, and Cuqui introduced her.)

Araceli does everything for me. She says she would have to do it for herself, anyway...cooking, cleaning, washing...and she might as well do it for the two of us. She even does my clothes-shopping. I hate to shop and she loves it, so I give her my ration card and tell her, "See if you can find anything for me." My friends say she's my nursemaid, and in a way she is! She reminds me of things I have to do, scolds me whenever she likes. Well, she's really family by now.

She and I live here alone in this big house. My daughter Celia lives just about half-a-block from here with her two daughters, and my sister lives just across the street, so we see each other often.

Was this your family home?

No, Joaquín and I took this house. We were renting it, but now it belongs to me.

You mentioned your sister and one of your daughters. Are they both revolutionary?

My sister and my older daughter, Celia, very much so. Celia is a member of the militia and a scientist — a biochemist.

What are the principal differences in life style between your daughters' generation and yours at their age?

Oh! There are so many! There's the matter of servants. Nowadays, hardly anyone has them. Then, the education of children. I had to work 14 hours a day to pay for my daughters' schools, but now my daughter works a normal schedule and her daughters go to excellent schools, and it doesn't cost her a cent. Even the university will be free if they want to go on studying when they're older. The differences are infinite.

It's another world now, a much better world. They don't have to worry about paying high rents or hospital or doctor bills, or of being without a job. So they can concentrate on working and studying, learning new things, advancing, growing. Many of the professions that are taught in our universities today were never a part of any curriculum in Cuba before the Revolution.

What about your younger daughter? Does she also sympathize with the Revolution?

No. That's another story altogether. She's the one I mentioned who did underground work before the Revolution. She left Cuba and is living in the United States. She had a good reason

for leaving. She married and had a child who had an embolism at birth and didn't develop normally. In 1962, many of our doctors had left the country and my daughter was advised to take the child some place where she could receive expert attention. So she went to the States, but never returned.

Have you any contact with her? Do you hear from her?

Yes, she calls me once or twice a year.

And how does she feel about the Revolution now?

She's absolutely irrational about it. So we have little to talk about. After we speak about the children and ask, "Are you all right?" "Yes, are you all right?," we really have nothing more to say. She can't understand us, and we've outgrown them.

We met in Canada in 1967. I got permission to go to Canada and we spent a couple of weeks together. But it was very hard, very difficult to talk. She doesn't understand me at all. Perhaps she would have had to read all the books we've read, make all the analyses we've made...

I suppose the fact that her husband doesn't sympathize influences her. He's a very good person, but he really cares only about his own immediate family. So we can't understand each other.

I remember that I made up my mind not to discuss my ideas any more as long as I was in Canada. But then one day I took my young granddaughter, Silvia's second daughter, to visit the World's Fair, and at the Cuban Pavilion, she saw all those big photographs of Fidel and Che and the other revolutionaries. She looked around at all of them and then exclaimed, "They're Communists!" (She was seven years old!) I nodded and said, "Yes." She said, "They're very bad!" Then I really couldn't contain myself. I said, "Well, look, I don't know who has taught you to think Communists are bad, but they aren't. They're just people with different ideas, and they're good." Then she asked, "Are you a Communist?" I said, "No, I'm not. I'm not good enough." So, I suppose I mixed that poor child up good and proper, but maybe some day she'll understand.

How do you define a Communist, since you said that you aren't one?

As a member of the Party. You know, Cuba isn't a communist country yet. No country in the world is. We're trying to build socialism now. So, here, when we say someone is a Communist, we usually mean he's a member of the Party. It would be presumptuous to call myself a Communist. I know I'm really not good enough.

You know, the first person in my family to call herself a communist (small "c") was my mother. It was early in the Revolution and she was over 80 at the time.

How did that happen?

It was very funny. She was reading the newspaper and came across something that someone had said that she approved of. She suddenly lowered the newspaper and said, "You know, I like being a communist!" My sister and I almost collapsed!

She accepted the Revolution well?

Very well — skeptically at first, as we did, then enthusiastically.

One day, early in the Revolution, a relative (who later left the country) came by to see Mother and told her, indignantly, that someone had said I had joined the Militia and that she, of course, had answered that it wasn't true. Mother looked up at her calmly and said, "Why did you say that? It is true." Later, Mother related the incident to me, laughing, and said, "I wish you could have seen her face!"

Was your mother in good health at that age?

Yes. She lost her memory later, in the last years of her life. She died in 1967 at the age of 91, but her mind was still perfectly clear in the first years of the Revolution. Just shortly before the Revolution, she went out to work as a volunteer at the Blood Bank and continued there until it was reorganized by the new government and volunteers were no longer needed.

She died while I was in Canada. She caught the flu and went very quickly. Before I left, I went over to see her and told her that I was going to Canada to see Silvia.

I asked, "You remember Silvia, don't you?" She thought a moment, then answered brightly, "Oh, yes!" in English. In her last few years, she spoke only English. She'd grown up in the States, of course, and only came to Cuba in her twenties, and as her mind began to cloud, she apparently reverted to that time. She would sit in a chair most of the time and pleat her skirt between her fingers, totally absent, but every now and then her mind would clear and she'd say something, always in English.

What was your mother like before the Revolution?

She was a wonderful woman. Very petite, only five feet tall. We admired her enormously. My father was fifteen years older than she and died in 1929 during the Great Depression. Father, as I said, was head of the National Archives, but when he died, because of the very bad economic situation of the country, the Government couldn't pay his pension, and Mother found herself in a very tight financial position. She said she couldn't just sit and weep, so she put on her little black widow's hat and veil and went out to work for the first time in her life. There were almost no jobs to be had then and fewer still for women, but Mother was very artistic and got a job with Dennison's, the crepe-paper company, teaching her friends and other women at clubs and places like that to make paper flowers. They weren't the ordinary kind of paper flowers; these were really exquisite. I remember that once she held an exhibition at our house and placed two or three real flowers in with hers in each vase, and whoever could identify the real ones by sight only won the vase and the flowers.

After a few years, conditions improved enough that the government was able to pay my father's pension and Mother was able to stop working.

I think it was remembering her example that gave me the courage to get a divorce and go out to work when I found I wasn't happy in my first marriage.

You're in your 6Os now, but you have no plans for retirement yet. If you inherit your mother's longevity, you could possibly go on working usefully for another 2O years — or more.

Who knows? Mother died relatively young...She was 9l. Her sister died at 98, and her husband, who was a cousin, at 99!

But it's true that I have no desire to retire. I love my work too much, and I'm being paid for doing what I want to do! In a way, I'm being paid to play. I work very hard, but it seems more like play to me.

Do you think most people in Cuba are happy in the work they're doing?

I don't feel qualified to speak for "most people," but my impression is that people in general are enthusiastic about their work — even those doing hard physical work — cutting cane, working in the brigades that are building dams, roads, schools; workers in factories. But you know, the Revolution stimulates this by giving importance to the work people do, praising them, encouraging them, rewarding them in special ways. And of course, it constantly urges people, young and old, to study and prepare themselves for more useful activity. Anyway, it's inspiring to know you're helping to build a new society.

That reminds me of something that happened a few years ago. I was showing a visitor around Havana, a woman from the United States. She suddenly stopped before a large poster on a wall,

staring at it. It was an enlarged reproduction of a photograph of an earnest-looking little boy, obviously of humble, rural origin, just looking out at you from the poster and, underneath, it said, "When I grow up, I'll be whatever I want to be." My visitor suddenly started to cry, and I exclaimed, "What's the matter? What's happened?" She stood there with tears rolling down her face, and said, "You can't imagine what this means to someone who knows the black districts of my country."

Was the photograph of a black child?

No. It was a little white boy, but it would have been exactly the same if he had been black.

One last question. You said earlier that you had doubts at first about Fidel and the other revolutionaries. What is your opinion about Fidel Castro now?

I think he's wonderful. I thought that from the first moment I heard him speak, and I still think so.

He says things that are very profound and complex and very important, but he explains everything so clearly and makes it all so simple that everyone can understand. I like his simplicity and his honesty.

1994 UPDATE

Since Cuqui was one of the women we interviewed in 1976, we returned in July, 1994, to her living room with its walls lined with paintings and photographs of her patrician forebears.

What are some of the things that have happened in your life since we last talked?

A number of things. One is that I have finally retired. I had to have an operation for colon cancer last year. I think I'm all right now, but my strength isn't the same. So I'm just taking life easy and enjoying myself, visiting friends, going to the theater... I also married again, but my husband died two years ago.

How did that marriage happen?

Well, it was funny, in a way. He came to my door one day by mistake, looking for my next-door neighbors. They weren't at home, but I knew they would return soon and, since he was an attractive-looking person, I invited him to sit on my front porch to wait for them. I offered him coffee and sat down to chat while he waited...and he just never went away again!

Like "The Man Who Came to Dinner"!

Yes, but different!

How long were you married?

Only two years. He was a very nice person, a good man, a widower. He wasn't anything at all like Joaquín, but we were able to offer each other friendship, companionship.

At least you were able to have the two years together! That's good. Meanwhile, life in Cuba has become much more difficult, hasn't it?

Ah, yes! Much more! It's extraordinarily difficult right now. My daughter Celia, for example, goes to her research center and returns by bicycle every day. That's about 15 kilometers each way, but she says it's better than taking a bus, and there isn't enough gasoline to take her car. It's healthy, of course, but it's also very hard, especially since our diet is very limited right now.

I see that your sofa has been reupholstered and there's a Lada parked in your driveway. Is that yours?

Yes, but now we have a gasoline problem, like everyone else.

Cuqui, looking back over all these years, is there anything you regret or anything you wish had happened differently?

(Cuqui remained silent a moment, musing, then shook her head.) No. Except for the loss of my two husbands, I don't regret anything. I wouldn't want to change anything.

NOTES:

- ¹ Bachiller y Morales, Antonio. A major historian and bibliophile, called "the father of Cuban erudition". His fervid and sustained love of his country added great charm to his work.
- ² Céspedes, Carlos Manuel de. One of the greatest figures in Cuban history, a plantation-owner who initiated the Ten Years' War for Cuba's independence from Spain in 1868 and became the first President of the Revolutionary Government-in-Arms.
- ³ José Martí. Illustrious patriot, exceptionally brilliant poet, writer and thinker. He initiated Cuba's Second War of Independence from Spain. His memory is revered by Cubans of every tendency.
- ⁴ Agramonte y Loynaz, Ignacio. An outstanding General and heroic figure in Cuba's Ten Years' War for independence.
- ⁵ ICRT, Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión.

GLORIA GONZALEZ

We first interviewed Gloria in 1976 on the terrace of her home in the Siboney section of Havana, a handsome suburban residential area bordering the older, more aristocratic Country Club section (now called Cubanacán). Siboney was built up shortly before the Revolution by the newest element of Havana's bourgeoisie — the nouveau riche and married sons and daughters of the older bourgeoisie. The suburb is characterized by large, modern, occasionally ranch-style, houses set far back from winding, tree-lined streets amidst luxuriant well-kept gardens.

Gloria was an attractive woman of 58, with blonde-gray hair and a quiet, completely self-assured manner. During our interview, her glance strayed out constantly over the lovely, tree-shaded garden surrounding her home. As usual, we began by asking about family background.

I was born in Spain. My family was of the lower middle class in a small town in Asturias, called Salas, in the Province of Oviedo. My father had a small store and a large family of eight children.

Spain at that time, in the 192Os, was at war in Morocco. To avoid being sent to Morocco and, also, because their country was very poor, many young boys, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old emigrated to America in the early decades of this century.

My oldest brother and several of my cousins did the same, choosing Cuba as their destination. My brother had received only a primary education in our small town, but he was intelligent and hard-working, and here in Cuba he did well. At first he worked at different jobs, always saving his money, and gradually he prospered. Then he started a small factory, making mattresses, and sent for the whole family to join him. My father and my second oldest brother came first. The following year, my mother and the rest of us came. I was six years old at the time and crossing the ocean on a ship seemed an incredible adventure to a child coming from a poor Spanish village.

Once we were settled here, the smaller children of the family started school and the older ones began to work in my brother's factory. Later, my twin sister and I, who were the youngest in the family, also began to work in the factory while we continued our studies. Both my sister and I loved to paint, and we began to decorate the children's furniture that was also made at the factory.

As a result of all this, we had an anomalous social situation within the family. My brother and two or three other members of the family were the owners of the factory (and, later, of the chain of stores that sold the factory's products), while the rest of us were workers, sharing the vicissitudes and limitations of the other employees. I think that's why both my sister and I were able to identify so easily later with the Revolution. Our sympathies were with the working class, in spite of our brother being the owner of the factory. My sister and I continued to work and study, although it was difficult to study here before the Revolution. We managed to finish our *bachillerato*. Then we began to study painting at the San Alejandro School of Art. My sister dropped out after a time, but I continued and graduated. At the time that I was studying, in the

early 4Os, there was intense political agitation here in favor of social change. My sister and I, as I said, sympathized greatly with the working class, but we had no real political education and, at the same time, we were influenced by a certain admiration for our oldest brother. He had read and educated himself and achieved real success, and we felt proud of him, but he didn't really care at all about the social conditions of the people who worked for him. My sisters and I often argued with him, sometimes bitterly. We knew things weren't as they should be. So we participated secretly in the student and worker strikes and demonstrations — even though, as I say — we had no political education.

Was your father still living then?

Yes, he was living. But because of his poor education, he was eclipsed by my brother, who became the real head of our family from the moment we arrived in Cuba. My mother also had very little education — I think she had only finished sixth grade — but she was intelligent and had a strong influence on us.

Was she religious?

Yes and no. She had, of course, been educated in the Church, like everyone else in Spain, but she never went to church. She said her conscience was clear in knowing that she did nothing wrong, and it wasn't necessary to go to Mass. We children went because we wanted to. She was very hard-working and intelligent and she had a strong sense of justice and of right and wrong. She was an admirable woman. She was proud of her oldest son, but she also opposed him whenever she thought he was wrong. For example, at first he was against our studying painting at San Alejandro, but my mother approved. We said, "Mamá approves, so we're going to study." We started without saying anything to our brother, but later, after we began to win prizes, we went openly and he stopped objecting.

After my graduation from art school, I held several exhibitions, but I wasn't satisfied. At San Alejandro, we learned our trade, as one might say, but within a framework of outdated academic concepts that frustrated our artistic development. That was also the heyday of abstractionism, and I couldn't feel abstract art — not to paint it. I could enjoy it at exhibitions, but only in a formal way. I couldn't feel it. It seemed dead to me.

For a time, I stopped painting, but later I began to paint portraits — mostly of society women — to earn my own money in order to travel and continue studying.

I went to New York and studied first at Columbia University and then at the Art Students' League. I lived in a rooming-house and spent my time visiting museums and galleries, painting, reading, exploring the city. Meanwhile, I had met my future husband through a letter my brother had given me, asking him to "look out for me."

He was the son of a Puerto Rican family, who had gone to New York to study medicine, but when World War II began, he went into the U.S. Army. After the war, he felt too old to go on studying, and so he started in the export business, instead. He exported textiles to Latin America and my brother's factory in Cuba was one of his clients.

We came to Havana to be married, then returned to New York to live and our three children were born there. When they were small, I stopped painting. I had no time for it.

My husband's business prospered in New York, but in 1955 we decided to move to Cuba, and my husband established an import-export business here. Since Cuba exported only sugar, rum and tobacco, and imported practically everything else, the import-export business was a very good one to be in if you wanted to make money, so we were very well off economically. We put our children into good private schools and began to build this house.

By 1957, Fidel was already in the Sierra Maestra, and feeling against Batista was strong. Both my husband and I sympathized with the 26th of July Movement and bought the bonds they sold clandestinely to buy weapons and supplies for the struggle in the mountains.

Did anyone in your family belong to the 26th of July Movement?

Not directly, but a son of one of my brothers had some connection with it and sold us bonds. This was precisely a son of my oldest brother! But it was merely an adventure for him. He was one of the many who thought the Revolution was going to be a kind of game. Later, when he saw he was wrong, he left the country.

Would you say that most of the middle class sympathized with the 26th of July Movement at first?

A large part of the upper and middle class at first supported Batista. Since he had the backing of the United States, he seemed to promise economic stability for business, but when the economic situation worsened and it became evident that he couldn't control the revolutionary ferment, the bourgeoisie in general turned against him and hoped the revolutionaries would overthrow him. But that was all they wanted. They used to say, "It will be enough if the new government is honest." After the insurrection was successful and Batista had fled, all the houses around here had little signs reading, "Gracias, Fidel!" My husband felt the same way. When people began to worry about whether the Revolution was going too far left, he said, "Don't worry. Water always seeks its level." He, like so many others, thought it was just a matter of time before things returned to "normal".

The early days of the Revolution were very, very hard for me because, as the Revolution became more radical, there was the inevitable clash of ideas within the family, and relations became strained and difficult. When the nationalizations came — first of foreign-owned businesses and later of large national businesses — most of my family and our friends were affected. Our social life fell apart.

The most difficult part was the struggle with loyalties. My sisters and I sympathized with everything the Revolution was doing, but when my husband's business was nationalized, he turned against it. My older brother had money outside the country and left, together with my second brother, in 1961.

What did your husband do after his business was nationalized?

He was offered a job in the Ministry of Foreign Commerce, but he was used to being his own boss and wasn't willing to work for the government. I didn't agree. I immediately applied for a job as a teacher of art and was hired. Before the Revolution, you needed to know a politician or pay someone off to be able to get a teaching job, but all that had changed. We needed income, and so I began to teach. We sold some of our belongings and found that we could manage. Our children's schools, which had been very expensive, had been nationalized and no longer cost anything, so that was no problem.

Did you also suppose at the beginning that the Revolution was only going to be reformist?

No, I never thought that. From the background of most of the leaders, one had to expect that the Revolution would be profound. I expected it would be.

And didn't that alarm you at all?

It didn't really. The laws passed by the Revolutionary Government for the benefit of the country and the tremendous opposition of the United States government to those laws helped people understand what was involved. By the time of the bombing of our airfields just before the invasion at Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs), we weren't surprised by Fidel's announcement that the

Revolution was going to follow a socialist path. I think it was already in everyone's mind. The people were ready for it.

Were you worried during the invasion?

Naturally, we were all tense and anxious, but I don't think I was really worried. By then, we were accustomed to armed incursions and expeditions and, until then, the country had been able to defeat them all, so I expected the same thing would happen at Girón. What happened is that people in Havana didn't realize how big the invasion was, the magnitude of it, until it was all over.

I was much more worried a year later, during the October Missile Crisis. That was a time when the Cubans were impressive...really impressive. I received a telephone call from my school early in the morning telling me that everyone was being asked to go to their place of work for guard duty of indefinite duration. My husband was here with the children, and so I left. It was a difficult moment because it was impossible not to wonder if it was the last time we would all ever see each other. No one said it, but it was in all our minds.

When I arrived at the school, I immediately asked to be made a member of the Militia. I've belonged to it ever since. Our daughter Aurora left the house after me and went to her school and also signed up for the Militia.

Didn't your husband oppose that?

Oh, yes. But I supported her. I think I've had considerable influence on the life of my children...at least, it seems to me that I have. Aurora and I had the same ideas from the beginning and insisted on our right to act according to our political convictions.

What about your other children?

Our second daughter, Diana, was less politically active, less involved than Aurora. She was influenced at first by some of her friends who didn't have the same strong convictions as the circle Aurora moved in. But later, Diana, too, became militant and our son as well. My husband also had more influence on Diana and our son, since they were younger than Aurora. But both later became completely identified with the Revolution.

Then in 1968, my husband's older sister started urging him to go to the States. Their mother had died, leaving him some money; it was necessary for him to go sign some papers, etc... Finally, he made arrangements to leave as a repatriate, since he had retained his U.S. citizenship. He assured me that he would only be away three months at most. I told him, "It seems to me that it will be very difficult for you to obtain permission to return if you're leaving as a repatriate," but he assured me that the Immigration Office had told him he would have no difficulty. He left and, about a month later, telephoned me to go to Immigration to get the permission for his return. I went, but, as I had thought, according to Cuban law, he could not return after having requested repatriation to the U.S.

Since then, he has been waiting...waiting...waiting. I went to see him in 1969. I requested and obtained permission to go. We met in Canada and spent a week together. I couldn't stay longer because it was during the school term and I needed to get back to my classes. Also, I needed to return on the same ship I'd gone up on. There were no flights to Canada as there are now and, if I hadn't taken the same ship back, it might have meant a delay of several weeks before another ship sailed for Cuba.

His idea the whole time, just as it was before and has been since, was that he return here — never that we go there. He's always known that I would never leave Cuba, and he's always agreed to that. He considers that the children are better off here. Even before he left, he preferred the education that they were receiving here.

Even though he rejected the system?

Yes, it's an odd thing. In spite of that. And he feels proud of his children. Our oldest daughter, Aurora, is head of the Systems Engineering and Computer Research Center of the Polytechnic University, and she and her husband are both members of the Party. Our second daughter, Diana, and her husband are both graduates of the School of Dramatic Arts. Our son, Juan, is a graduate physicist and a professor, and he's also a chess champion and an International Chess Master. His father is very proud of that. He sends him chess magazines regularly and follows his progress in the newspapers.

Isn't your husband bothered by the fact that his daughter is a member of the Communist Party?

Apparently not. He's proud of the fact that she's successful. Graduating from a university, winning a scholarship to study abroad, obtaining a high position in your work, winning a national or an international championship — all of these things, for him, represent success.

And don't they represent success in Cuba, too?

We think of them more as duties and responsibilities. For example, if society makes it possible for them to study at a university, they should study hard, graduate and try to win a scholarship abroad if possible, because the country needs the special training that this will provide. Obtaining a high position implies great responsibility.

Do you think your husband's opposition to the Revolution has more of a personal than a political bias?

I think the correct analysis is that he lacks political understanding. His interest in politics and ideology is very, very superficial.

Did you become a member of the Party?

No. I've been chosen as an "exemplary" worker by my fellow workers and proposed for the Party, but I wasn't accepted — mainly because I was unwilling to break off my relationship with my husband. As a general rule, Party members are expected to abstain from correspondence or personal contact with exiles living in capitalist countries.

What has happened to your twin sister in all this time?

She married one of the workers at our brother's factory, so she has always had very close relations with the working class. She and her husband have three sons. One is still a student, another is a technician and the third is a hydraulics engineer. The two oldest are in Angola as volunteers at the moment.

How do you see Cuba's participation in Angola?

We see it as a duty of solidarity. We understand Angola's situation very well because we were just starting out on the path of Socialism when we were blockaded and isolated. If the Soviet Union hadn't come to our aid, we couldn't have survived. Now we see Angola in the same situation, its neighbors afraid to go to its aid. So when President Agusthino Neto asked for our help, I think almost everyone in Cuba felt a moral obligation to help in every way possible.

You've referred several times to your sister and yourself as the members of your family who most sympathized with the Revolution. Are any of your brothers revolutionary?

No. My youngest brother has remained in Cuba, but he isn't revolutionary. He works and he's a very good worker, but he doesn't participate in anything else and he criticizes everything. He resents the fact that our brother's business was nationalized, but I think his negativism is

primarily a question of personality. I've never known him to be in favor of anything. He has one daughter and both she and her husband are revolutionary.

Isn't it difficult to live and work in Cuba not being revolutionary?

No, because he isn't counter-revolutionary. He doesn't do anything *against* the Revolution. He's just what we call "apathetic". In fact, he lives perfectly comfortably. He was earning \$700 a month in my brother's business, and he has continued to earn that because the Revolution respected the salaries people were earning before the Revolution. My brother has his house, his car, a motorcycle, his work, etc. But he's never been a person who identified with his surroundings; he's never been sociable. His wife and daughter participate in activities of their block committee, that sort of thing, but he doesn't, and nobody tries to oblige him. He lives his life and nobody bothers him.

You said you expected the Revolution to bring about a profound change in society. What specific things did you want to see changed?

I was especially concerned about the illiteracy in the country and the poverty. For example, every time you went downtown to shop, you were accosted by beggars from almost every doorway. And I hated the economic differences. I think that many, many Cubans in my socioeconomic situation felt as I did. You felt very bad to live comfortably, even with luxuries, and at the same time, see all the poverty and illiteracy around you, the inequality. And you began to feel guilty and to think that something had to be done to change things. You didn't want to continue in that situation.

Those are mostly the things I wanted to see changed, and that I wanted to help change. I feel very privileged to have been able to help a little, with my little grain of sand.

Weren't you ever afraid of being left destitute yourself in a revolution?

No. In the early years, I saw that we were losing almost everything, but it didn't worry me. For a long time, our only income was my salary, which wasn't big, but we managed to live on it, even though we had been accustomed to spending money very freely, too freely, as everyone else here "in society" did. At one point, we thought we were going to have to rent or sell this house, but we were able to scrape through finally and keep it. I had to let the gardener go, and for a long time very tall grass grew right up to the edge of the terrace here. We felt as if we were living in the deep jungle! But the important things, the children's education and health services, were guaranteed by the Revolution, so I was never frightened. And our house, of course, already belonged to us.

Many people think that property ownership is forbidden in a Socialist system.

Not the ownership of personal property. You can have a house — or even two houses if you own one at a beach, for example — for your personal and family use, but not for renting purposes.

Have you continued working all through the Revolution?

Yes, but at the moment, I'm resting. I've worked very hard since the beginning of the Revolution. For several years, I was teaching painting at two schools simultaneously — at San Alejandro and at a school for scholarship students. At one point, because of lack of teachers, I was even teaching English, although my English is far from good.

Later, I became head of San Alejandro. Still later, I moved to the National Institute of Art as technical advisor and head of the School of Plastic Arts. And now, I've just retired in order to paint. I've retired to work, but to work at what I want to do. I hope to have a few years yet for creative activity. The administrative work I've been doing was satisfying and useful but so absorbing that it left me little time for anything else.

I began to paint again in the Revolution, but only rarely because of my responsibilities. In the last two years, I've been doing "weekend" painting, and the fruit of that has been two or three portraits that have pleased me. I've exhibited them in several places, and the last one — a head of my young granddaughter — won first prize. And now, I hope to do more. My themes have been mostly personalities of the Revolution — several portraits of Fidel, many of Che...Camilo, Ho Chi Minh. When I *feel* a personality, I'm inspired to work with it.

I also intend to continue teaching, but only once a week at the Higher Institute of Art.

Do all artists in Cuba receive a salary from the State?

All artists in Cuba have some kind of a job and receive a salary from their job. Some work as illustrators, some as teachers, some as functionaries in the Ministry of Culture, etc. Professionals who are paid only to paint or create are very, very few.

Many people have the idea that artists in a Socialist society can't express themselves as they choose — that the State dictates what they can express. Is this true in Cuba, would you say?

I think that idea grew out of the fact that abstractionism was seen in the Soviet Union as a purely formal kind of art that said nothing to the people. It was considered that art should have a more realistic content, a content that the people could understand, so abstract art was officially rejected. Here in Cuba, an artist can paint or create in any form he chooses, as long as he doesn't try to use his art against the Revolution. In the beginning, as a reaction against the academic tradition, the Cuban school of art went totally over to abstractionism. The first graduates of the National School of Art (that's now a part of the Higher Institute of Art) were enormously influenced by North American and European tendencies. But gradually the artists have been changing, without anyone imposing change on them, so that the content of their work is different, at the same time that they retain a very free, very personal form of expression. Our idea is to produce art that the people can understand but without lowering the quality of the art, to produce art that aims both at comprehensibility and at raising the people's level of artistic appreciation.

What do you miss most from your life before the Revolution?

I don't miss a thing — except my husband, of course.

My life is much richer now. When I was young, before my marriage, I had a good relationship with people in the factory, close relations with working people I've never forgotten, the people that my sister and I were fond of then. Later, after my marriage, my husband and I moved in a circle of frivolous people. I had friends but not intimate friends...some that I still remember with affection, but they weren't like the real friends of my early years, friendships I still maintain. Then there are the friends I've found in the Revolution...people I've worked with side by side through all these tremendous years and that I love dearly...both men and women...artists, fellow teachers, students. I feel as if I live surrounded by an enormous family.

Did you and your husband travel much before the Revolution?

Yes, we went to Europe several times.

Did you enjoy it?

Yes... more or less. I think I would enjoy it more now than I did then. Now I would know better what to look at and what to look for...what questions to ask people. In the past, I traveled superficially, blindly.

You are very limited now in your travel possibilities, aren't you?

Well, we can't travel for pleasure to capitalist countries because that requires hard currency that Cuba needs for foreign exchange, but many Cubans travel abroad to study or on official missions. In fact, everyone in our family has been abroad except my daughter Diana, and she, of

course, complains about that. I was in Canada in 1969. Aurora studied in England for a year. Aurora's husband studied two years in France and is now in Poland. My son has been abroad to many different countries participating in international chess tournaments in Mexico, Santo Domingo, Venezuela, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia...

So except for your husband's having left, you have no regrets? Nothing you wish had been different?

Only that. That was a great error, although I know that he expected to return. For the rest...if I could live it all over again, I wouldn't change anything. I'd want to do everything the same, only better. I'd want to fulfill myself more completely as a mother and as an artist. Above all, I wouldn't want to change a single detail of the way our children have developed.

AURORA

Aurora Fernández, in her early 30s and strikingly lovely, although her only make-up is lipstick, is the oldest daughter of the painter Gloria González. In view of her presence, we asked to interview her, too, to get what we believe is a fascinating mother-daughter composite picture.

I was born in New York in 1947. Two years later, my sister Diana was born, and two years after that, my brother Juan. When we were small, my mother brought us to Havana every summer for a two or three-month holiday, and my father would come some time during that period for two weeks or a month.

We came to live permanently in Cuba in 1955. My parents decided to come because of the climate, because my mother wanted to be near her family and because my father knew there were good business opportunities here. When we first came, mother brought us down and left us with her family, while she and my father went to Europe for a three-month holiday.

When they came back, my sister and I started school at the American Dominican Academy, a private Catholic school.

Father started an export-import business and soon was doing very well. He was making lots of money and expected to make a lot more.

However, one of the first things that the Revolution nationalized was large foreign and national businesses. My father's firm was expropriated in the early part of 1960, and he turned completely against the Revolution.

How did you feel about the nationalization of your father's business?

It was a big shock for us. Because I was only 12, I didn't really understand what was going on or why. Besides, I was very influenced by the nuns at my school. They told us the most absolutely stupid things about the Soviet Union — that they had a statue of Judas in Moscow, that people there killed and ate children, incredible things. So at that moment I was very confused. However, in spite of our being very affected economically, my mother saw the nationalizations as social justice and insisted that they were necessary so that everybody could have the same opportunities. So she helped me accept the idea.

Some hard times followed for us all. There was little money in the bank because most of my parents' savings had gone to pay for this house, which was built in 1958, and the furnishings for it. Besides, we had two cars to keep up, three maids, a gardener, etc. So my parents started selling things. My father sold one of the cars, and we finally let two of the maids go. Mind you, we were able to manage because in those first years there was very little to spend money on — only the barest necessities in food and clothing. Those were really critical years.

Then, in 1962, Mother got a job teaching art at a secondary school. That helped solve our economic problem, but it created a new problem because my father didn't want to be supported by his wife.

What was your father doing during this period?

My father wasn't doing anything. He hadn't received compensation from the Government for his business, but he was offered lots of jobs because he knew a great deal about textiles. He was really an expert. The Minister of Foreign Trade and the Minister of Commerce came to see him personally to offer him a job, but my father said, "No, no. I don't want to work." He meant, of course, he didn't want to work for the Revolutionary Government.

Since he was a U.S. citizen, he knew he could leave the country whenever he wanted to, but he stayed on to see what would happen. He finally left in 1968, and he's wanted to return ever since, but he hasn't been able to.

Let's go back to your own history.

Well, I continued in school at the Dominican Academy until 1961, when all the private schools were nationalized. I was in 7th grade then and, of course, I wanted to continue studying, but my father was dead against my going to a public school. He said, "No, no. Now all the schools will be boys and girls together, black and white. You can't go on studying here." He wanted to send me to live with his sister in California and go to school there. But I didn't want to go to California. I wanted to go on studying here in Cuba, and I did.

Meanwhile, the National Literacy Campaign was just beginning. I wanted to take part, but I didn't ask to go to the mountains or to the rural areas. I didn't have enough political consciousness yet to want to do that. But I asked to teach the three maids we still had in the house at the time. They were three sisters from the country, very nice girls, but none of them knew how to read or write. So my mother and I decided that our contribution to the Campaign would be to teach them, and my father agreed to that. In his mind, that was a humanitarian thing to do.

In 1962, I began Grade 8 at a secondary school in Vedado. I had to go so far away because there was none near my home, and there I was elected to the revolutionary youth organization called "Young Rebels." Then, in the first year of my high school — what we call Pre-university — in 1964, there was a reorganization and the UJC, the Young Communist League, was formed. All the members of the Young Rebels were analyzed to see if they were really good students and fulfilled all the requirements of the new organization. Of about 300 members in my school, only 13 were ratified for the Communist Youth, and I was one of them.

What are the requirements?

First, you have to be chosen by your fellow-students as "the best" in every way, in your studies, in your revolutionary activities, in helpfulness to your fellow students, in modesty. Then you are analyzed by the Union leadership regarding all aspects of your life. If that is satisfactory, you become a member of the Union.

I was named Recording Secretary of the Union at my high school and had to take minutes at all the meetings. Now it's much better organized, and we don't have so many of them, but at that time, we had meetings almost all the time. Since many of them were at night, I often got home very late, and that, of course, caused serious problems with my father. My mother had to tell him that I was with friends doing something else. But every time I arrived late, he would shout at me, and the whole situation was very unpleasant, which is the reason why I don't honestly feel close to my father or miss him very much. The last years he was here, our relations were extremely tense. For him, I was a kind of "black sheep."

At the end of my second year, I was elected the best student in the province of Havana and won second place in a national competition. That pleased my father, of course, but we tried to avoid discord by keeping most of my activities from him. For example, in my last year of high school, we students were asked to go to the province of Matanzas to help in the sugarcane harvest for 15 days. My mother said, "Your father will never let you go." But I told her, "We can tell him that I'm going for two weeks to Varadero Beach with Gisela (a friend of the family), and he won't

object to that". So we told him that, and I spent 15 days with my fellow students working in the canefields. We were stacking cut cane, which is very light work.

Then, when we finished high school, we had to spend 45 days doing social service in rural areas as a requirement for entering university. Students are expected to help pay for their studies by doing socially useful work during a small part of the year. When I explained this to my father, he accepted it — only because he wanted me to study at the university, not because he agreed with the idea. So we spent 45 days in the country near Alquizar doing different kinds of agricultural work, digging potatoes, picking tomatoes, harvesting bananas.

I started at the University of Havana in 1965 and graduated in 1971. There, I was elected to the executive board of the Young Communist League. I was also active in the FEU, the Federation of University Students, and held different posts — International Relations, and others. I kept up my marks at the same time. From my third year on, I was teaching, too, because I had been selected at the end of second year, together with a small group of my classmates, to take a course in computer programming at the Academy of Sciences. Then, when we completed that course, we taught computer programming to the students of 3rd, 4th and 5th years of our own Faculty. During my last years, I also did research work in the petroleum industry, the sugar industry, and elsewhere. And I graduated third in my class. So, as you can imagine, I was very busy.

After graduation, I was offered a scholarship to take my Master's Degree in Operational Research — that's applied mathematics — in England. It's a part of Systems Engineering, which is my field of specialization. So I spent a year at Lancaster University in England, where I took my degree. Then I returned to Cuba and continued teaching at the Industrial Engineering Faculty and working in the UJC until last year, when I was made a member of the Party. Since 1974, I've been head of the Systems Engineering and Computer Research Center of the Polytechnic University. Now I lecture and do research work and direct our Center. And I also devote some attention to my husband, who's a fellow professor-engineer at the Polytechnic University.

Tell us more about your brother and sister.

My brother, who's four years younger than I, is a physicist. He also teaches at the Polytechnic University. And he's an expert chessplayer, an International Master. Last year he was Cuban National Champion. My sister, Diana, who's two years younger than I, is a graduate of the School of Dramatic Arts. Her specialty is theatrical costumes. Diana is the only one of us who's inherited Mother's artistic tendencies.

How do you explain your acceptance of the Revolution from such a young age in spite of the fact that it meant giving up a very comfortable life?

In part, I think it was because of my mother's influence. And my aunt, my mother's twin sister, was very, very revolutionary from the beginning. But even more important for me early on was the Villaseca family. I ate lunch at their house every day during my secondary school and spent all my free time between classes there, and they were very revolutionary.

The father, Salvador Villaseca, was vice-president of the *Banco Nacional de Cuba* and a personal friend of Che Guevara, whom I met at their house fairly often. Che made a tremendous impression on me. I was 14 years old, and meeting leaders of the Revolution such as Che and Raúl Roa² there at their house as family friends naturally influenced me.

Che was very good-looking, with his beard — very attractive. He came to the house two or three times a week to receive mathematics lessons. Villaseca was an economist and Che was a medical doctor, but he was also Minister of Industries and needed to know mathematics. So Villaseca offered to teach him. It seemed incredible to me to see this very intelligent man with so many revolutionary responsibilities there devoting himself so earnestly to learning mathematics — for the good of the Revolution. It was nothing he needed for himself. So it was in that house

that I decided that my father was wrong and my mother was right and that I wanted to be a part of the Revolution.

Then the invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 was a decisive moment. I remember very well how we huddled under our beds while the U.S. planes were bombing Columbia Airport, very near our house, but what horrified me most was my father's saying that there was going to be an invasion, that the bombing was just a prelude to it, and that he was glad of it, even if we all died. He hoped there would be a war, and he didn't care if we all died as long as "his side" won!

The following year there was the October Missile Crisis, which started the day after my coming-out party. Most of the boys who'd been at the party, including my boyfriend, were in the first year of university, and the next day they were all mobilized. My father, again, was hopeful that the Revolution was going to be destroyed. Meanwhile, I could only think that my country was in danger and my friends were mobilized. I went immediately to my school and joined the Militia and asked to work in the sanitary brigades or anywhere else I was needed. Father was furious when I came home in the Militia uniform, and every time I came in from a guard duty or left for one, it was the same, so that we had scenes and fights all the time. But from that time on, I became completely immersed in the Revolution.

What, exactly, did becoming "completely immersed" in the Revolution mean?

Above all, very hard work. First of all, as a member of the Communist Youth, I had to work very hard, as I said. Now, it's very easy, but in those years it meant constant activity — running here, running there, mobilizing students, doing all kinds of jobs. Going to the country, to factories to do voluntary work. Doing guard duty. And all the time, keeping up one's marks in school.

What was your attitude to religion?

We were Catholic, like most people. We went to Mass every Sunday and took communion, and we children all went to Catholic schools. But it didn't go very deep. It was mostly a formality. When I was about 12, I thought I wanted to become a nun, and my father was indignant. He was so angry he threatened to take me out of the school where we were taught by nuns. So I think he couldn't have been a very strong Catholic.

I stopped being a Catholic in 1963 or 1964 — after I was already a member of the Communist Youth! It was a contradiction, but since the Communist Youth (the UJC) wasn't very well organized at that time, no one even asked about my religious beliefs. Anyway, I had to go to Mass on Sunday because my father took us to Mass. We had to go. Then, about a year after I'd been in the UJC, I told my father, "I'm not going to Mass anymore." His reaction was terrible, but finally he said, "All right. You don't have to go if you don't want to, but you'll surely go to Hell when you die."

What's the advantage of being in the Party?

Well, Party members are really the people who give the most to the Revolution. Your only privilege is that you work the most. You have the satisfaction of knowing that you don't do more because you can't. You do everything you can and whatever you are asked to do by the Party, and you know all the time that you are absolutely useful.

You have the right to express your opinion directly to the Central Committee about everything you think is wrong or needs to be changed, and you can be sure that your opinion will be considered and that you'll be answered by one of the members of the Central Committee itself...

You know you have the admiration of the people. I suppose it's a form of prestige. Your conscience is very clear. I've always had a strong sense of responsibility. Even as a little girl, I was always the one who first woke up in the house and called my mother to get me dressed to go to school. So now I have the same sense of responsibility to the Revolution, to my country, and the Party provides the channels through which I can work for the good of the country.

One of the criticisms most frequently leveled at Socialism is that there are no personal liberties, that human rights are violated. What is your opinion about that?

Yes, I heard and read those arguments frequently the year I spent in England. But what are personal liberties? The right to think as you choose? To say what you think? To choose your friends? To choose the work you want to do or not to work at all if you have someone to support you? We have all those liberties. No one puts you in jail here for your beliefs. You can be religious and go to any church you like or believe in anything you like as long as you obey the laws. Our block committees, called "Committees for the Defense of the Revolution," know who is revolutionary and who isn't, and those who aren't go on living or even working if they want to work, and nothing happens to them. Some just live from their prerevolutionary bank accounts, but nobody bothers them as long as they respect our laws.

In England, many newspapers attacked the Government and made fun of or insulted the prime minister, and people said that was very good, that it was an example of democracy. But I don't think democracy is a matter of being able to mock the prime minister; I think it's a matter of how much people participate in the decisions that affect their life.

I don't think people in England feel they have much voice in their government, but here people are consulted and they have real participation. Laws that directly affect the people are discussed in detail in every work center and every block committee all over the country, and opinions and suggestions are offered before the projects become laws. For a long time, we didn't have elections here; we didn't feel that we needed them. But now we have our National Assembly and our system of People's Power with direct election by secret ballot of the people who hold office in our government, so even the humblest worker can really feel represented in the government or even be elected himself. What we have is a different kind of democracy, a workers' democracy—workers meaning professionals, artists, industrial workers, manual workers, farmers...all kinds of workers.

In what ways would your life have been different if it hadn't been for the Revolution?

I think I might have studied to be a secretary to some executive, or something like that, and my long-range ambition would have been simply to get married and have children. I doubt that I'd have studied at a university. My father would probably have considered it a waste of time for a girl, although he'd have wanted my brother to have a profession of some kind. At most, my father might have let me and my sister go to the small Catholic university here, Villanueva.

I certainly wouldn't have had any political activities or responsibilities. Perhaps I'd have belonged to some women's organization and collected money for charities...as my mother had done until then, having teas, playing bridge or canasta. Mother was bored. She says that she only really found herself in the Revolution, through her work, feeling useful. I feel the same way.

1994 UPDATE

We revisited Gloria and Aurora in early 1994 to update their stories. This time, we spoke in a single session with both mother and daughter.

Gloria, we learned, now fully retired, has been painting and exhibiting, in Cuba and in Spain, and at the moment of our meeting was preparing a new exhibition.

Diana, Gloria's younger daughter, is teaching on a two-year contract in Spain, together with her husband, although their two daughters are studying in Cuba.

Gloria's son Juan is now assistant director of an important Cuban enterprise that creates software for industry. He no longer competes in chess tournaments and plays only rarely. Software, he says, has a lot in common with chess and, like that game, is extremely absorbing. Perhaps one of his two young children will follow in his footsteps in chess — or in computer science.

Aurora, looking not much more than a day older than when we last interviewed her, talked with enthusiasm of the work she is doing at present.

I'm in charge of Graduate Studies at the Ministry of Higher Education, although I continue to teach twice a week at the Polytechnic University. As part of my work at the Ministry, I'm also in charge of a new undergraduate program of Management Science that we've introduced into the study of Industrial Engineering at my Institute and into the study of Economics at the University of Havana. The program's been worked out in collaboration with a Spanish university — they send experts, books, etc. here and we send students and professors there. The idea is to prepare our students to face the new world we have to live in. We have no other choice.

To teach them how to be capitalists?

To teach them how the capitalist world functions and how to deal with it. We've also been organizing specialized postgraduate courses in Management with the help of Spain and Mexico.

We'd like to ask your feeling about Cuba's present difficult economic situation. Some people are feeling quite depressed about it, but we have the impression that you both still feel very positive. Is that correct?

GLORIA: It seems to me that, from the point of view of its purity...of the dream of the Revolution, concessions are being made, but they're necessary concessions. Everything has changed in the world, and this opening up to other tendencies, to allowing foreign capital to invest in the country, for example, has been necessary. Many people criticize it, and deep inside me...I dreamed of continuing with what we had. But now, with the new economic conditions, I don't think it can go on. It's very difficult to sustain it, surrounded as we are by a world full of wolves eating wolves. We dreamed of a paradise on earth, and I think that, in many ways, we came close to it, but we've had to wake up to reality, sad as it is.

And your feeling, Aurora?

I still have hope.

And is that based on a kind of gut feeling, or on ideas, or what?

Because of my position in the Ministry, I have a lot of information about what we're doing in terms of foreign investments in Cuba, and I think we still have a slight chance of getting out of the hole we're in. My impression is that we're in a very deep depression right now, and if it lasts six or seven months more, people may not be able to hang on. But I think we still have a chance. If we don't begin to reverse the situation in that time, then there'll be nothing more to do.

What do you mean — nothing more to do?

I mean major changes would take place...I really don't know what they would be. But that would happen if we go on six or seven months more with such shortages of food and soap and medicines, above all of medicines. People can't stand to have their loved ones ill and not be able to get the medicine they need for them.

Perhaps oil will save us. We know there's oil in Cuba. If it can be exploited in time...The worst thing that could happen would be that the country fall into the hands of the Cubans who left. I think that would lead to a very bloody situation.

But even if you do manage to "climb out of the hole," as you say, the Cuba that is evolving is quite different from the Cuba that existed when we last interviewed you. In what ways is the country going to be different, do you think, even if the government manages to keep hold of things?

I think the main difference will be in the mind of the people. I, for example, belong to the "second generation" of revolutionaries. I was ten years old in 1959. My generation and those

who are older lived the dream that Mother spoke of — of creating a world in which everyone worked for the good of all, for the ideal of a better world. Those who are younger than me see the world more pragmatically. Many have lost faith and many think that if capitalism returns to Cuba, it will be the capitalism of Canada, the United States, Spain, Sweden. They don't realize it will be the capitalism of Guatemala, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic. I was recently in Costa Rica, that's held up as such a model, and it's true that the first two or three kilometers along the sea are impressive, but from there back, everything is an enormous slum. And that's where three-fourths of the population lives!

Our young people never knew the poverty and ignorance that existed in Cuba before the Revolution, and when you tell them, they think that's all ancient history and has no relevance to the future.

So do you think changes can be made without losing everything you've gained?

I'm not sure, but I know we can do things better. Many things can be improved. For one thing, people became accustomed to receiving and even expecting everything with very little effort on their part. Our labor laws, with many rights and very few obligations, are excessively favorable to the worker. So I think we have to change many things no matter what happens.

GLORIA: People complain about the difficulties we have now, but I was talking the other day with two women, one Cuban and the other Nicaraguan. When I asked the Cuban if she planned to have any more children, she said, "Heavens, no! With the situation as it is, impossible!" But the Nicaraguan woman said, "A difficult situation is what we have in Nicaragua. You don't have anything like that here."

AURORA: No. We have many social benefits here that many other countries don't have. But I still say, we have to find a happy medium.

Then, Gloria, was the dream worthwhile?

It was worthwhile because many good things were achieved. The country was covered with schools and hospitals and research institutes, and they're all still functioning and all the teachers and doctors and scientists that were trained are still working. We even have many industries of different kinds that never existed before, although most of them now lack raw materials. But I agree with Aurora. Now we have to be more pragmatic. It's the only way we'll be able to survive. But there's no doubt that many good things have been done. The country is a different place now. And, besides, you know, it's good to dream.

NOTES:

¹ San Alejandro, Cuba's oldest school of art.

² Raúl Roa, known as "the Chancellor of Dignity", was a prominent university professor who became the first Foreign Minister of the Revolution.

MARGOT DEL POZO

Margot is a good-looking, highly intelligent, dynamic woman who was thirty-eight when the Revolution came to power. Already one of Cuba's most successful architects before the Revolution, she continued her profession "practically without missing a beat" through the hectic first moments of the big change-over and right on up to the present. As usual, we began our interview by asking about her family and family background.

I'm married. My husband is an architect, too, and we've spent most of our married life working together as a team.

We have two children of our own, both grown now, and a daughter we raised though she wasn't our own. Our own daughter, Yolanda, is a graduate architect and she's also married to an architect. They have four children. Our son, who studied geophysics, is married and has three children.

The girl we raised left Cuba when my parents left in 1965. She preferred to go with my mother and father, and we had no legal authority to prevent her going, especially since her real mother had been living in the States, married to an American, since before the Revolution.

My family background? My father's family, as far back as we have a record of it, was Cuban and, before that, Spanish. My father was an executive at an American-owned sugar mill. He earned a good salary, and we lived very comfortably. The houses were supplied by the company, and executives and their families had many privileges and lived well. By "living well," I mean we had, as I say, a good house and all of the modern conveniences as they became available, just as the American executives had. My mother always had maids and other help and I don't remember ever lacking anything. We were two brothers and two sisters, and the same was true for all of us.

My maternal great-grandfather was Austrian. His name was Seiglie. My mother's is the only family in Cuba with that name. The Austrian's son, my mother's father and my grandfather, was a lawyer, but he also founded a candy factory that was the best in Cuba. The candies were made from Cuban fruits and were really marvelous. They were sold packed in special boxes of fine Cuban wood and won prizes at exhibitions in Paris and Vienna — that sort of thing.

(Margot raised her wrist and showed us a large gold coin dangling from the bracelet she was wearing, handed down from her great-grandmother. The coin bore an image of Carlos IV and the date 1787.)

I remember that one of the rooms in my grandmother's house had a collection of diplomas for prizes awarded to the factory's candies at exhibitions and fairs in France and other countries. After my grandfather died, my mother's oldest sister, my Aunt Ana Rosa, continued the factory, but she finally tired of all the complications of running a business and closed it down. The secret of making those wonderful candies died with her, because she never taught anyone the formula. Others have tried to make candies like them, and some of them have been quite good, but never like my grandfather's that were truly superior.

My mother grew up in a fine, colonial-style house in Remedios, in central Cuba, that belonged to my Austrian great-grandfather; and it's, even today, considered one of the best houses in the town. And the town itself is an architectural gem. Three of my old aunts (who were really my mother's cousins) still lived there in the house — all old maids — until they died just a few years ago. They were eccentric but delightful. They invented their own words very often, and many of them I still use. People often ask me where such and such a word that I use came from and, when I've looked it up in a dictionary, I've found that it doesn't really exist. But those words are part of our inherited family vocabulary, and for me they have meaning.

Something else that both my mother and I apparently inherited from our Austrian family line is a love of cooking, and I'm a good cook.

I consider that I had one of the happiest childhoods anyone could have, because I grew up almost a savage, doing whatever I wanted to do. I loved horseback riding and had my own horse from the time I was very small. Every morning, my horse was saddled and made ready for me, and until I went away to school, I rode practically every day of my life. My brother Juan and I always had our own horses, but my older brother and my sister never cared for horses or riding. My last horse, the one I had while I was studying at the University, was named Toni.

I didn't go to school in the usual way. Mother had been a teacher before she married and she taught us reading, arithmetic — that sort of thing — at home. Later, we had private tutors who came to our house. There was a public school at the sugar mill, but at that time public schools were terribly poor, with practically no books or even copybooks or pencils. One of my private teachers was the teacher at the public school, and she always invited me to go to the school on Fridays. I loved that because she'd formed a chorus and we recited and sang, and I've always loved singing.

When I was thirteen, I began to like a boy at the sugar mill, and my parents decided it was time for me to go away to school, as my brothers had already done. I didn't want to go. I was very happy at the sugar mill and hated going away, but I had no choice. My parents were adamant, especially my mother, who had a very strong will. So I became a pupil at a convent in Havana. My family wasn't religious at all, but the only good schools here were private religious schools, so I went to the Ursulinas and my brothers went to Belén, the same school that Fidel Castro attended.

The schooling I'd had was extremely uneven — in some subjects very advanced and in others very weak, but I found that I understood everything so quickly and easily that I did my seventh and eighth grades in one year.

At the Catholic school, one of the most important subjects was religion, and I began to be outstanding in my classes in religion, too. I became an enthusiastic Catholic and was chosen president of the *Asociación de las Hijas de María*, which was the highest honor a student could obtain. I won prizes for essays on religious subjects, even essays against materialism, which I certainly didn't understand a word of, but I won the prizes!

And did you believe in what you were taught in your classes in religion?

Yes. While I was at school, I believed in it firmly. I wanted to believe in it. I went to Mass every morning. We got up at 5 a.m. every day and the first thing we did was go to Mass and take communion. It's true that I had doubts at times. One contradiction that troubled me was the great difference between the living and working conditions of the "mothers" and the "sisters." We were taught "humility," but the only ones in whom we saw any real humility was in the poor "sister" nuns who did all the drudgery at the convent. But in general I accepted everything willingly and even enthusiastically.

After five years at the school, when it was time to go on to the university, I was so attached to the place that I tried to get permission to return there to sleep at night and to be there on weekends!

Later, at the University, I began to have more serious doubts, seeing the tremendous abyss between what people did outside of the church and what they professed in their religion, but really, I blamed the people and not the religion.

Wasn't it unusual for women to study at a university at that time?

More women were beginning to study then, and it never occurred to me not to go. For me, it was a part of growing up. Just the next stage. But when I began architecture in 1939, of the ninety-odd students, only seven were women.

And now?

Now, I think the proportion is about half and half, not only in architecture but in most schools.

Were you active politically at the University?

Not at all. I was politically illiterate. I didn't understand it and, besides, I rejected it. Everything I had seen or heard of politics from the beginning of the Republic — the deals and constant robbery of the public treasury, the governments that displaced one another only to do the same as the last — all of that disgusted and repelled me. And precisely in the years that I studied at the University of Havana, there was very little student political activity. Those were the years of the world struggle against fascism and naziism, and student political attention was centered mostly on that struggle.

Would you say that you had a social conscience at that time? Were you aware of the social and economic differences in Cuba?

I was always conscious of them because I'd seen them all around me since childhood at the sugar mill, and that was always painful for me. There was an enormous difference between the executives and the workers, in the way they lived, and it seemed to me that the abuse of the workers was terrible. I consoled myself in the belief that my father tried to defend the workers, but in the course of time I came to realize that wasn't really true. He seemed more democratic because he was less strict and more willing than others to listen to the workers, but there were two distinct classes and, in the end, my father always sided with the owners, the side that had the upper hand.

What about your husband's background?

I met Vicente at the University where we were classmates, and we married the year we graduated, in 1945. Vicente is descended from Spaniards. He's the grandnephew of José Martí¹. His father was a musician, a very well-known pianist here who also recorded Cuban music for the pianola in the United States. Vicente's mother, Amelina, was the daughter of Martí's sister, Amelia, and everyone says there is a tremendous family resemblance between Vicente and José Martí. From the photographs and paintings of Martí, I agree.

What about Vicente's religious and political background?

Martí was a freemason, and perhaps that had some influence on him, but Vicente never had any religious convictions, although he was educated as a Catholic and the rest of the family, except his father, were practicing Catholics. He detested the political situation in Cuba before the Revolution, as I did, and avoided any participation in it, but he has always been more politically aware than I. I was never able to make head or tail of what was happening in politics, while Vicente was much more analytical. But even without understanding politics, I despised Batista, as most Cubans did.

When Vicente was a boy, he knew a labor leader named Carás who was one of the organizers of an attempt to overthrow Batista by a general strike. That was during Batista's first period in power in the 193Os. The man was arrested along with seven or eight other labor-union leaders.

But they didn't go to jail. They were taken out to the suburbs, machine-gunned and left there for dead. One of them, Vicente's friend Carás, survived and was able to escape and tell the story.

When Batista overthrew the Prío government in 1953, Vicente and I were working as architects in the Ministry of Public Works just as we were beginning to acquire a reputation as private architects. Public repudiation of Batista's second coup d'etat was so strong that, soon afterward, a decree-law called *Los Estatutos* was circulated in all public offices, requiring everyone who held any kind of job related to the government to sign a document stating that they were in agreement with the state of the government. We, along with others, refused to sign and, of course, were promptly fired from the Ministry of Public Works. We knew, naturally, that signing would have guaranteed our posts in the Ministry, but even though we had no hope that our "fine gesture" would change anything, it was still necessary, as a matter of principle, to oppose the dictator who had overthrown the country's elected government, bad as it was.

Prío's government was terrible — corrupt, dishonest, but the people had been preparing to elect the *Ortodoxo* Party precisely at the moment that Batista took power by a military coup in the middle of the night. The *Ortodoxo* Party had been formed as an expression of public revulsion against the country's long series of corrupt governments, and everyone believed that it had a good chance of giving the country honest government.

Were you and Vicente members of the Ortodoxo Party?

No, but we and all of our friends intended to vote for them.

So the country was opposed to Batista from the first, and as people, especially young people, began to express their opposition to him more and more, he and his gang became more brutally repressive. Life is so different now that it's difficult to remember what a real nightmare the country lived through during the Batista regime. But it wasn't just the police brutality. It was the lack of schools and health care and decent living conditions for the working class. The unemployment. Large slums had sprung up in Havana and most of the other cities of the country. Of course, all that had been going on for a long time, but it got even worse under Batista.

Did you or Vicente participate actively in the opposition?

In a limited way. We did what we could. We gave money to the 26th of July Movement after it was formed, very secretly. A friend of ours, Cesáreo Fernández, also an architect, who'd played football with Vicente at school, was our most direct contact with the Movement, the one we gave money to, etc. He had one of the most dangerous jobs — bringing in weapons. He would go to Miami, buy a new car and hide weapons very ingeniously in the car and then bring it back to Cuba on the ferry that used to operate between Florida and Cuba. After delivering the weapons here, he'd sell the car and, a short time later, repeat the operation. Near the end, the police were looking for him and he had to go underground. He was never caught, although he had several very close calls and, on one occasion, the police detained his wife as a warning to him.

One of his closest calls came one day after he was already underground and was supposed to meet someone in a large apartment building. He had just entered when several police cars arrived with their sirens screaming. The police immediately surrounded the block and began to search the buildings, apartment by apartment. Cesáreo saw that it was impossible to leave, so he rang at one of the doors. A woman opened, and he pushed his way inside and explained his situation rapidly. He told her that if the police found him there, she should say he had threatened to kill her if she didn't hide him. The poor woman was very nervous, but she finally calmed down and agreed to help. When the police rang a short time later, she opened the door and indignantly demanded to know how many times they were going to search the same apartment, that hers had already been searched twice, and why didn't they get organized! The police said, "All right, lady, all right." And they left. Cesáreo, meanwhile, had almost fainted from fright!

Once the Revolution was in power, Cesáreo began to work as Director of Architecture and City Planning for the Municipality of Havana. He was an admirable person, but unfortunately, he died of a heart attack as a result of all the tensions he'd lived through during the insurrection and overwork during the first year of the Revolution.

Vicente's and my participation consisted of helping friends that we knew were active in the Movement and giving money to the cause. Then, when we learned of the struggle of Fidel and the Rebel Army in the Sierra Maestra, we bought the most powerful radio we could find and prepared an air-conditioned room in the basement of our house to listen to the broadcasts of Radio Rebelde from the mountains.

What made you think Fidel Castro would be different? You said you had been repelled by politics before.

We have a saying in Spanish that hope is the last thing one loses. We had been disillusioned so many times before, but we had to believe that someday things would get better. Without hope, one can't go on living. And as far as I personally was concerned, the fact that Fidel and the others with him were fighting against Batista was enough for the time being for me to be on their side, with no other questions asked. But then, when I heard Fidel speak for the first time, it seemed to me as if the scattered pieces of a huge jigsaw puzzle suddenly began to fall into place, and everything began to make sense where nothing had before. As a result, we tried to be even more active in helping the Movement he headed.

The son of one of our neighbors, a student at the University of Havana, participated in one of the many demonstrations against Batista, and the police, as usual, attacked the students with clubs and revolvers, seriously injuring and wounding a number of them. (I remember that one of the students hurt in that particular demonstration was Camilo Cienfuegos². I don't remember the year exactly but, of course, it was before the rebels landed in Oriente Province on the Granma in December, 1956, because Camilo came on that expedition.) Anyway, our neighbor's son was so severely beaten he lost his sight temporarily and had a number of other complications for quite a long time afterward. The family was frantic because, with all his injuries, the boy was under arrest in the hospital. All his parents could think of was how to get him out of the hands of the police.

We knew an official of the Red Cross whose brother was a Lieutenant Colonel in Batista's army, so Vicente went to see the Red Cross official to ask him to try to do something through his brother to help our neighbor's son. That was the way it was. Whenever anything happened, you went to anyone who might have some influence to try to save the person involved, even though you knew you were putting yourself at risk in doing it. The man promised to try to help, but I don't know whether he did or not because the boy's parents also made a number of contacts. The boy was finally released, but to this day he limps slightly as a result of the brutal beating he received.

After that, the family was so opposed to Batista that they even hid weapons in their house. Vicente and I had built their house and made a trap-door in the bathroom to facilitate access to the plumbing installation. The trap-door to the empty space wasn't visible unless you knew where to look for it, because it was inside the cleaning closet, and the family stored weapons in that space. The idea, of course, was to use the weapons, sooner or later, against Batista. But in spite of all that, after the Rebel victory, that family left Cuba. The son, the one who was beaten, left with them but later returned to Cuba, and he's here now.

During that time, one saw that the country was steadily sinking deeper and deeper into corruption and vice and all the violence that went with it. No one was safe at any moment from the danger of police brutality or even of being killed, with or without a reason. Three of Vicente's students at the School of Architecture were killed by the police at that time. José Ramón Rodríguez was shot down in the street and left to bleed to death; Osmany Arenado was killed in the attack on the Presidential Palace, and José Antonio Echevarría, who was president of

the University Students' Association, was shot down near the University after he told the people by radio about the attack on the Palace.

Our neighborhood was inhabited largely by upper-middle-class families; many professionals had built in this zone and the general tendency among them was rejection of the Batista regime. After the struggle began in the Sierra Maestra, the 26th of July Movement started a campaign for people to show their repudiation of the regime by not putting up Christmas decorations either inside the house or in the gardens, as had been traditional until then. We were one of the families that didn't decorate, and one day the president of our Neighborhood Association visited us to try to convince us to decorate as usual. He pointed out that we were calling attention to ourselves by not doing it. He was putting discreet pressure on us — in a way, indirectly threatening us.

In what year was that?

In 1957 and again in 1958, when the Rebel Army was fighting in the mountains.

I remember, too, that in 1958, Osmany Cienfuegos³ was arrested. He had just graduated as an architect and his fiancee, Selma, later his wife, who was still studying, worked with us doing drafts together with Cecilia Menéndez, who was a permanent employee of ours. All three of them were active in the insurrectionary movement. The day after the arrest, Cecilia arrived at our house. She told us that Osmany, Selma and Selma's aunt had all been arrested, and asked if we had any contacts who could help. She had Selma's sister with her and asked if we could hide her to prevent her being picked up, too, which, of course, we did.

This was very late in 1958 and, by then, Vicente had "used up" his few contacts, helping other people. By that time, too, anyone who tried to intervene on behalf of anyone else was considered suspect himself and ran the risk of being detained. But it was necessary to do something, because the head of Batista's police had publicly given an order that no more prisoners were to be taken — in other words, suspected revolutionaries were to be shot on sight.

Then we remembered an architect, Pepito, a son of Pérez Benitoa, who was the head of the construction business that handled all the major constructions of the Batista government. Another son, Pepito's brother, was married to Batista's daughter! While Vicente was still a student, he had worked as a draftsman in Pérez Benitoa's office and he had also given private lessons for a time to this fellow, Pepito, and become a friend of his. So he decided to go see him.

He arrived at his house around 8 p.m. and found him dressing to go to the official opening of a Military Club that he and his father had built for Batista. Naturally, it was probable that the full General Staff of the Army would be present.

When Vicente explained his reason for coming, Pepito told him that what he wanted was very difficult because the first thing the Army people would ask was why he was interested in the case of Osmany Cienfuegos. Vicente told him to explain that the interested party was he, Vicente, and that he in turn was concerned because Osmany was a student of his at the University, which was true. Pepito promised to do what he could, and they agreed that he would call Vicente at home the following morning to give him any information he had and also to be sure that Vicente, himself, hadn't been picked up meanwhile.

He did call the following morning and asked Vicente to go see him. Over coffee, Pepito related what had happened the previous night. He had been able to talk with no less than Batista's chief-of-police and with the head of the S.I.M., the really sinister secret police. Both of those men were known to be brutal assassins. In any event, after the evening was well advanced and everyone had had several drinks, Pepito broached the subject of Osmany, with the result that he was promised that Selma and her aunt would be freed the next day and that Osmany wouldn't be hurt. They just wanted to "scare him a little", so he would be held for a few days. Sure enough, Selma and her aunt were released within the next two days, but we learned that Osmany was in the police hospital, which meant that he had already been tortured.

We had just recently finished building a house for an Army doctor, and we decided to go see him. It turned out, by extraordinary luck, that he had been on duty precisely at the moment that Osmany was brought into the hospital. The poor man was trembling with fear and implored us not to tell anyone what he was telling us. He had seen Osmany, who had obviously been beaten, but the doctor didn't consider that he was gravely injured. He couldn't promise to examine him because Osmany was under guard in the hospital and attended by another doctor, but he would try to find out his general condition. He did advise us later that his life wasn't in danger, and we communicated this information to Cecilia. Meanwhile, she had made contact with a nurse, who kept them informed and, some time later, Osmany was released.

Cecilia Menéndez was the first person to advise us of the fall of Batista. The telephone rang at about 6 in the morning on the first of January. It was Cecilia, almost shouting, "Margot, Batista has fallen! He fled the country by plane and at the moment, this and this and this is happening!" For a moment, I thought I was dreaming. I stood with the telephone in my hand, unable to believe the news at first. Then I dashed to the radio and switched it on and, of course, it was true. At that moment, the radio was just beginning to broadcast the news.

Then, with the rebel forces in power and with their enemies calling them "communists," everyone began to talk about socialism and communism, and I didn't know one from another and had to go to the dictionary to try to find definitions! And there was so much fear of communism — just the word terrified many people, who had no idea what it meant. That was mostly what caused so many people to decide to leave the country.

Were you afraid?

No, never. For one thing, words and names have never frightened me. The only thing I care about are people's actions. At the same time, our former system had always been so corrupt, it seemed to me that almost any change could only be for the better. And Fidel and Che talked and talked, always explaining to the people, and I found that I agreed with everything they explained. But I was still a Catholic, and the Church opposed the Revolution from the beginning. A series of TV debates were held on materialism and idealism, and it turned out that those words have entirely different meanings in philosophy from what people normally attach to them. The "idealist" side was defended by a priest from Belén whom I'd always considered a wise and profound scholar. But as I followed the debates, I realized that his answers were inadequate and, what's more, incomprehensible. It was shocking for me to find that the materialist arguments I was hearing for the first time in my life made complete sense and put everything into its place. I decided I urgently needed to study and learn in order to understand what was happening. Just at that time, a theater-director friend of ours invited me to join a course in revolutionary instruction that was going to start at the CMQ radio station and, although I had nothing to do with radio, I was allowed to take the course.

From there, I was chosen to pass on to higher-level courses and went through all the levels of revolutionary instruction. At first I thought that one could be a good Catholic and a good revolutionary and that, with intelligence, one could argue about the points of difference. I believed that the Revolution was mistaken from the point of view of philosophy, but as I studied more Marxism, I discovered that I could find no convincing arguments to stand against it. It's interesting that now, thirty years later, and after all the confrontations between believers and nonbelievers, what I thought then — that one could be a good Catholic and a revolutionary — is now a reality. And now a believer can even be a member of the Communist Party that leads our Revolution. Nevertheless, I confess that the philosophy of existence continues to be a deep mystery for me.

You said that your parents left early in the Revolution. Were they opposed to the Revolution?

Tremendously. They didn't agree with anything about it, and finally, it was impossible for us to hold a conversation without antagonisms arising. Another thing was that my mother missed

my sister, who was the "baby" of the family, and wanted to be near her. My sister and her husband have lived in Miami since before the Revolution. They have a business there and their children were born and grew up there.

My two brothers left, too. The eldest went to live in Puerto Rico. He's a natural free-enterpriser, and socialism didn't appeal to him at all. My younger brother, who was a poet, left more for the adventure. He went to live in Chicago, but I think he lived a dissolute sort of life, and he fell ill and died there some years ago.

Have you seen any of your family since they left?

Yes. We visited my parents and my sister before my father died in 1976 and my mother in 1981, and we've visited my sister and her family more recently. We keep in touch by letter and, occasionally, by telephone, although it's very difficult to make contact by phone.

What would you say made you decide to stay although the rest of your family left?

I wouldn't say I "decided to stay." I never made that kind of decision. It just never passed through my mind to leave. This is my home and my country and at no time did I even consider the possibility of leaving. My husband, my children, my grandchildren, my work, my home are all here. My life is here.

In what way is your daily life different now from the way it was before?

I realize that there has been a great change, but it came about so gradually...My time...I used to have more free time. Vicente took care of the greater part of the work. I dealt with the clients, and I paid a lot of attention to decoration, landscaping, bathrooms, kitchens and details in general, but Vicente did most of the work. So I had plenty of time. I loved going shopping. I also loved to entertain, and we did a lot of that. I studied guitar and took a course in haute cuisine. I've always loved clothes, and I designed and made many of my own dresses and Yolanda's and Julie's, too.

We were members of the Havana-Biltmore Yacht and Country Club, and we used it to take the children to the beach, but I never participated in the canasta parties or other social life. It seemed to me a waste of time, and I didn't enjoy it.

There have been changes in our home. Because of the housing shortage, when our son married, we added an extra wing to the house to accommodate them. At that time our daughter, Yolanda, was living on the Island⁴, where she and her husband were working. Later, they decided they wanted to return with their children to Havana, but the problem was where they would live. So we again added onto our house. Fortunately, the house lent itself to expansion, although we hadn't had that in mind when we built it before the Revolution.

Another difference between then and now, of course, is that it was very normal to have servants before the Revolution.

How many did you have?

After the children were born, always three or four. There was the nursemaid, the laundress, the housemaid, the cook and the gardener, but the gardener worked for other people, too.

Little by little, they all disappeared after the Revolution because, logically, when they were offered better opportunities, they didn't want to go on being servants. Meanwhile, the children were all in school and, little by little, too, I had taken over their work without too much difficulty. I told you I like to cook, and I'm fast in the kitchen. It's the part of housework I like best. Also, I'm myopic, and the dust I don't see doesn't worry me, so I'm not the world's best housekeeper in that sense.

Then, later, I inherited a housekeeper, Juanita, from a friend, and she lived here with us and was almost like one of the family. We needed her especially to take care of the dogs when we were away on trips after Vicente and I began to work all over the island. I'm a dog lover and

we've always had three or four dogs, although now we have only Brenda. (She caressed the glossy black schnauzer lying at her feet.) Later, Juanita became too old to work and went to live with a friend, although we've kept in touch and she has occasionally come to see us. And now I have only a man who comes in once a week to clean.

You say dust doesn't bother you, and I don't see any, but I am seeing that you certainly have many things to catch dust!

(Margot laughed, looking around at the handsome ornaments, photos and objets d'art occupying every conceivable surface in her living room and at the walls entirely covered with paintings by major Cuban artists and several excellent ones by Vicente, whose hobby is painting.)

My brother, the poet, told me once that I was 'terrified by empty space'. I guess he was right.

Did you travel much before the Revolution?

Not really very much. I traveled to the States a number of times. That was very easy then. Not like now. We had a permanent visa and went whenever we liked. But, really, I preferred going to places here in Cuba.

My parents loved to travel and after Papá retired, they traveled a lot — to the States very, very often and to Europe — France, Italy, Spain.

What about money? Has there been much change in your income?

Oh, yes, of course! We had a very good income before the Revolution, but it was...unpredictable. We would have a steady stream pouring in from many clients and then there would be times when it was more spaced out, so it was impossible to know for sure what your earnings were going to be. Now that we're retired — although we've gone on working free-lance until the last year or so — we've had income from our pensions, which happen to be fairly high because our salaries were high. But at least we know exactly how much we can count on and plan our lives accordingly.

What about expenses? I suppose they've changed, too?

That's what I was going to say. A time came when we had practically no expenses, and money became almost irrelevant. The children's schools were free. We owned our home, and it was fully equipped. Food and clothing were rationed, so we couldn't spend much on that.

More recently, the situation has changed. In the last two years, approximately, there's been almost nothing to buy, and when you do find something unrationed, it's very, very expensive because people are willing to pay almost anything for extra food, clothing or equipment of any kind. So money has acquired value again.

Do you miss being able to buy the clothes and other things you bought before?

Yes and no. At first, what happened was that our work changed. Before, we designed mostly private homes, apartment buildings, public buildings and some hotels. After 1959, the demand for architects was tremendous, but for government projects. At times, Vicente and I were being called for several different projects at the same time, and we found ourselves so busy there wasn't time to be worrying about clothes or entertaining or that sort of thing. We started designing schools that were being built in the mountains and, later, we did a tremendous amount of work on dairy farms, cattle-breeding centers, artificial insemination centers in the interior of the country. These were very modern installations, with air conditioning for the Holstein cattle that Cuba began to import from Canada to mix with our Cebú cattle. You know, the Cebú are ideal for our climate, but their milk production is low. The Holsteins give a high milk yield but can't stand our heat well. So Cuba began cross-breeding them to get a variety that has the best qualities of each. That work was fascinating because we would arrive at these places where there were practically

no signs of civilization and, then, when we returned there later, the development that had taken place in the whole zone was tremendous. It was very satisfying work, but we didn't need good clothes for it. In fact, the government issued us work clothes and boots when we were doing these constructions in the countryside and the mountains.

More recently, everything has changed and become more difficult, as I said. Cuba is in a bad economic situation, and it's useless to go out looking for anything; you have to buy whatever you find, if anything. Of course, I was lucky in that I had so many things before the scarcities began.

Others, especially young people who are just starting, find the shortages much more difficult to cope with.

What do you miss most from the past?

From the past? My good health. In the last year, I've developed osteoporosis, and it limits me greatly. Vicente is still in good health, and I'd give anything to have my health back. Well, almost anything.

I also miss having a car in good condition. In 1959, the first year of the Revolution — when you could still buy cars freely if you had the money — we bought a new Fiat, and we used it to make those trips into the country regions until it began to wear out and, at the same time, it became more and more difficult to buy spare parts. So when they asked us at the Ministry of Construction what we needed for our work, we immediately said that our problem was with transportation, and they gave us a new Renault. That was in '68. It was a marvelous car for rural areas because it's built high so that it's protected below.

Then in 1979, we were able to buy a new Lada, also because of our work, and that's the car we still have. It's 14 years old and still running, but it has constant problems now, logically. Life would be much easier if we could buy a new car.

You say you were able to buy a Lada because of your work. Does that mean that not everyone can buy a car, even if they have the money?

That's right. Since the beginning of the Revolution, the number of cars imported has been limited by the Government. People have to need a car for their work to be able to buy one. Cars are distributed by the different work centers to their workers who most need them and have earned the right to buy one through their merits. That distribution is almost paralyzed, though, at the moment. Cuba has to import most of its petroleum and it's very expensive, so I think the policy of limiting car-buying is wise, even though it's painful. Everyone, of course, would like to have a car.

The best solution would be to have a really efficient public-transportation system, but we don't have that either, unfortunately.

What you certainly do have are lots of bicycles!

Yes. Most young people, and lots of others, too, move around with bicycles, but not everyone has a bicycle and not everyone can use one. Here in this zone, for example, with so many steep hills, they're almost unusable. But Cuba by now must be one of the countries in the world where most bicycles are used; that's true.

The greatest change for you, then, has been in your work?

Yes, our work changed. In the past, before 1959, we always tried to build with the best taste and quality possible within the budget available (and people's budgets are rarely as large as their ideas of what they want to build), but we took pride in doing more with less. But then we were only solving the problem of isolated individuals and later we were helping to solve problems for the whole country, and that was very satisfying.

At the moment, we're not working because construction has been almost at a standstill in the last two years as a result of the country's economic crisis. Before that, we were doing hotels for national and international tourism, and hotel projects are very interesting. But I'd say that our most interesting work was when we were in Agriculture, although the constructions themselves were much simpler. But it was so useful — and also Vicente and I worked more closely than ever before, moving from one place to another in the car and talking all the time about what we were doing. I sometimes marveled that we were being paid for it. I enjoyed it so much it seemed extraordinary that I was also being paid to do it.

Do you ever regret that your children and grandchildren haven't been able to have the things you had when you were young?

Our children never lacked anything essential. If anything, they had more material things than I had when I was young, and our grandchildren are by no means underprivileged. They have fewer material things, but you don't miss what you've never known, and they've never gone hungry. Our children had their activities, sports and hobbies and our grandchildren have theirs. One of them has won medals for his roller-skating, for example. Another of our small grandsons studies piano and has won prizes in his age group and another has just begun to study violin.

Their parents have more of a struggle now to be sure the children get enough to eat, and we never had that problem. But they've never had to live through anything like the Batista period. Life is struggle, and each generation has to face its own problems, but I think our children feel they've been living in a constructive period, in spite of all the present difficulties.

Do you feel hopeful about Cuba's future?

Well, I have to feel hopeful. From a material standpoint, it could hardly be worse, so I trust it will get better. I certainly hope so.

Are you or Vicente a member of the Party?

No. I don't have the right qualities for it. Being a member of the Party requires a degree of dedication and sacrifice that I...My best friend, Hilda, for example, is an architect and a Party member. She has her home, her mother and two daughters whom she loves dearly, and yet the little time that she could devote to them she has to use, almost invariably, for her duties, for the tasks the Party assigns her. Her husband was a Party member — a wonderful person who was killed in an automobile accident while he was on a mission in Peru, building rural hospitals as a part of Cuba's aid after a terrible earthquake in that country — and I know Hilda feels she's carrying on his work. I couldn't do that. I'm more individualistic and, besides, I realize I'm too domineering to be a disciplined militant. I think that Vicente has the necessary qualities. He would be capable of sacrificing his time and of modifying his whole life for the sake of society, putting it ahead of everything else. To a great extent, he has done that, without being a militant.

Wouldn't you say that you've done that, too, to some extent?

(Laughing) As much as I could, without sacrificing everything else to it — and in a much more individualistic way!

NOTES:

- ¹ José Martí. Major poet, writer, thinker, leader of Cuba's Second War of Independence, known as the country's "Apostle of Independence".
- ² Camilo Cienfuegos. A revolutionary hero, one of the top Comandantes of the Rebel Army, killed in a plane accident.
- ³ Osmany Cienfuegos. Brother of Camilo, presently a high government official.
- ⁴ The Isle of Youth, formerly the Isle of Pines.

NATALIA BOLIVAR

A descendant of South American liberator, Simón Bolívar, Natalia is a tall, strong and attractive woman with an impressive history in her own right. A recent photograph of her standing beside a full-length portrait of Bolívar reveals an extraordinary resemblance between the two. We interviewed her in her home, the penthouse of a four-story apartment house in Havana's elegant Miramar section that she shares with her youngest daughter, a son-in-law and ten (!) dogs. An extremely busy woman, Natalia nevertheless graciously gave us many hours of her time.

Can we talk, first, about family background, beginning with the Bolívars?

Our family history has been traced by many historians. The Bolívars were Basques who came to America as *conquistadores*, and there are records of them in prominent positions in South America dating from 1553.

Our link with the Liberator came through his grandfather, Don Juan de Bolívar y Villegas, who was Governor of the Province of Caracas and Captain-General of Venezuela in the late 17th century. Don Juan's eldest son, Pedro de Bolívar y de Aguirre, founded the Cuban branch of the family after he was stationed in Santiago de Cuba as a young lieutenant in the Spanish Royal Army. Santiago at that time was the capital of Cuba, the seat of the *Audiencia Real*, and Spain's most important military stronghold in America. There Pedro de Bolívar met and married the daughter of a Spanish Brigadier, Juana Agustina González de Piña y López de Queralta. Juana had been born in Santiago de Cuba, and the records of the marriage in 1711, family births, baptisms, etc. are still kept in the Santiago Cathedral, and the ruins of their home still exist in that city.

Meanwhile, in Venezuela, another son of Don Juan de Bolívar y Villegas, Juan Vicente de Bolívar, became the father of Simón Bolívar. In other words, Pedro's children were cousins of the Liberator, since they had the same paternal grandfather. As a matter of fact, we're also related to Simón Bolívar through his mother's family, the Aguirres, but that's a more remote connection.

My father's family had a tradition of fighting for independence and against dictatorship. When the struggle began for Cuba's independence from Spain, three of my father's uncles fought with the Cuban forces. One, Arturo Bolívar, became Antonio Maceo's¹ aide-de-camp at the age of 17 and died in battle at 18!

My father, himself, was involved in the struggle against the dictatorship of Machado in the 1930s. In other words, our family has always been linked to the different liberation struggles in our history in one way or another.

My father's name was Arturo Bolívar y Bolívar. He bore the name doubly because his parents, my paternal grandparents, were cousins.

On my mother's side, the Arósteguis and the González de Mendoza, both families of very solid position, came to Cuba from Spain in the late 17th and early 18th century. The Arósteguis, who settled in Camagüey², had strong artistic tendencies. My maternal grandfather, Don Gonzalo Aróstegui, was a prominent physician, an excellent pediatrician, and also a patron of the arts, who

encouraged painting and culture in general. My great-aunt, Aurelia del Castillo, was a well-known poet. Incidentally, she was deported by the Spanish authorities for not letting her husband, a Spanish subject like herself, fight against Cuba during the first Cuban War of Independence when it began in 1868.

My mother's sister, Natalia Aróstegui, was a founder of Havana's Pro-Arte Society and she also sponsored many well- known Cuban artists in New York — Alicia Alonso, Rita Montaner, the composer Ernesto Lecuona, and others. She herself had a beautiful voice and sang at weddings of friends and in benefit performances here in Cuba. She recited the poetry of Gabriela Mistral, Alfonsina Estornin, Dulce María Loynaz (who, by the way, is a relative of ours), García Lorca...

All the Arósteguis played musical instruments and the family held musical gatherings and organized theatrical productions, but the one most active in all of this was my Aunt Natalia. It was the Arósteguis who gave me an appreciation of cultural values and taught me the importance of a rich inner life.

The other side of my mother's family, the González de Mendoza line, was a large and important family here. It was large because they had many children and were intermarried with most of the other aristocratic families, owners of sugar mills and plantations, businesses, real estate, banks. So that side of my family is very widely connected. As a matter of fact, the González de Mendoza relatives now hold a family reunion in Miami every five years, and included among the descendants of that family trunk is the Princess of Luxemburg. She was born in Cuba, a member of my mother's family. I attended her baptism here, but she was taken abroad while still a baby.

My mother always reminded us that her family had been able to enter the church on horseback. Aristocrats had a dispensation from the king to ride their horses into church.

A curious custom!

Yes, but you can imagine how little that mattered to me...if my ancestors were able to enter the church on horseback or not!

Can you tell us something about your childhood and adolescence?

I consider that my childhood and adolescence were wonderful, mainly because my family was so united. We had family gatherings every Sunday and everyone was very close, so that I always felt surrounded by love and understanding. I never remember feeling the lack of anything. As a child, I studied ballet, but that was disastrous! My sister, my brother and I swam and had an active club life. I was a champion in breaststroke at the Biltmore Yacht Club until I was fifteen.

The family traveled to Miami and New York often, and in New York we went to concerts and the opera and saw the shows on Broadway. I also used to spend holidays in Santiago de Cuba with the Bolívar branch of the family. My cousin, Caridad Bolívar, was married to Joaquín Bacardí, of the Bacardí rum people, and they had a daughter my age. We used to go out on their launch and their yacht and had great times together.

What about your studies?

Oh, yes. Of course, I studied. I've never stopped studying! First at an American school here in Havana, called St. George's School, and later at a Catholic school, the *Sagrado Corazón*, where I graduated with a Bachelor of Science and Arts degree in 1953. That same year, I also earned a Bachelor of Science degree at the *Instituto del Vedado* and matriculated in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Havana. While I was studying at the University, I also graduated from Madame Trottier's French School and took night courses at the San Alejandro Art School.

In the summer of 1955, I went to New York and studied drawing, painting and composition at the Art Students' League under some wonderful teachers: Will Barnet, Morris Kantor and Norman Rockwell. They offered me a scholarship to stay on at the school, but my father had had a heart attack, and I decided to return to Cuba. I was just 19 then.

I also had a personal exhibition of painting and drawing at Havana's *Nuestro Tiempo* gallery. Then in 1956, the University was closed down because of all the agitation and student demonstrations against the Batista dictatorship, and I began to take courses in Spanish art, Chinese art, Egyptology, Cuban art, etc. offered by the National Institute of Culture and the Cuban National Museum. But my most important studies were the courses I followed in Research Methodology, Ethnography and Afro-Cuban Ethnography under Dr. Fernando Ortiz³ and Dr. Lidia Cabrera⁴, because they decided my future work. I studied with them from 1955 to 1958.

What can you tell us about the other members of your family? Have any of them remained in Cuba?

My brother, who is also named Arturo Bolívar, left and is living in Puerto Rico. My sister María Teresa, whom we call Marietta, has remained in Cuba. Marietta worked at the *Banco Nacional* until she retired a couple of years ago. My parents also stayed here, but my father died in 1980 and my mother died this year (1994) at the age of 91. A cousin, Rita Longa, the sculptress, is here. Both she and her husband stayed. He was Fernando Alvarez Tabío, a very prestigious judge, who was Cuba's ambassador to the United Nations in the early 1960s. Both Fernando and Rita were very progressive even before the Revolution, and now one of their sons is the official historian of the Revolution.

And your husband and children?

Well, I have three daughters and I've been married eight times, but my daughters all belong to me — not to their fathers! My oldest daughter, Natasha, is 31 now. Her husband is Chilean, and they're living in Colombia at the moment. My second, Carla, is very artistic. She's unmarried and is working with my cousin Rita Longa, doing restorations of some of Rita's works. And this one, Bubi (indicating her 26-year-old daughter present at the interview), as you can see, is pregnant now. Since she's diabetic, as I am, the doctor has ordered her to rest. He said it was necessary if she wants to have the baby, and of course, we want to have the baby! It will be my first grandchild.

This is our family. (She shows us a family-group photograph that, besides herself and her three daughters, includes Felipe, Bubi's husband, and a young Chilean exile that Natalia describes as "my adopted son, who is part of my life, too." Her daughters and the young men are all good-looking young people. Felipe is clearly mulatto, and Natalia adds, "As you see, Felipe is Negro.")

Does your unmarried daughter, Carla, live here with you, too?

No, she lives in what was my mother's, her grandmother's, home.

How did your parents feel about the Revolution?

The only thing I can say is that they stayed. They loved their homeland and, since their two daughters didn't leave, they stayed with us.

Natalia, we know you were active in the struggle against the Batista dictatorship. How did you happen to get involved in that, given your social background?

Well, I wasn't such an exception. Everyone was against Batista, and lots of people from good families were involved in one way or another. Look at Fidel Castro, for one, and Vilma Espín⁵. Vilma's from one of the best families of Santiago de Cuba. But there were many others. What

happened is that many turned against the Revolution later and left. I don't criticize them, but I don't agree with them, either, even when some ninety percent of my family left.

Do you think your Bolívar blood had something to do with your fighting spirit?

Yes, I think it's possible. As I said, my father's family had a long fighting tradition.

Can you tell us something about your participation in the struggle against Batista?

I became a member of the *Directorio Revolucionario*⁶. That was in 1955-56 after I became emotionally involved with José Luis Wangüemert. He was the son of one of Cuba's best journalists, of the same name. I was very young, but I was having an affair with the son while we were both working at the National Museum, where I was a guide specializing in Afro-Cuban religions. Well, I wasn't really *specialized*, since I was just beginning, but I met José Luis and fell in love with him. He was an extraordinary young man, and he taught me many things that have greatly influenced my life. It was through him that I became an activist in the *Directorio*, and began to live a double life. But then José Luis was killed during the attack on the *Radio Reloj* radio station on March 13, 1957, in the same commando operation in which José Antonio Echevarría⁷ was killed. That operation was part of what has become known historically as the Assault on the Presidential Palace.

Wasn't that an attempt to surprise and, at least, capture Batista?

Yes. We hoped to spare the country more bloodshed by eliminating Batista, and it almost succeeded, but in the end, it failed.

Did you participate in the attack on the Palace or the radio station?

Neither, but after the attack I became a member of the Executive Board of the *Directorio*. I also represented the *Directorio* on the Executive Board of an organization called *Mujeres Oposicionistas Unidas* (United Oppositionist Women) that played an important role in the last three years before the 1959 victory of the Revolution because it brought together women of all tendencies who opposed the Batista dictatorship. We tried, above all, to help political prisoners, the rebels and Cubans in exile and their families.

On the 12th or 13th — I've forgotten which — of July, 1958, I was arrested for my activities and tortured. Later, I was able to take asylum in the Brazilian Embassy. But I left the embassy and went underground.

You left the safety of the embassy and again participated in underground activities?

Exactly. I participated, as part of a *Directorio* action group, in acts of sabotage — for example, I was one of the organizers of the attack on the 15th Precinct Station⁸.

Was that where you had been held and tortured?

No, I was held in the *Buró de Investigaciones* that was under the command of Orlando Piedra and the then-Colonel Laurent.

Raúl Díaz Argüelles and Gustavo Machín were among those who worked with me in the underground.

What became of them? Are they still in Cuba?

"Tavo" Machín died with Che Guevara in Bolivia. He was the "Alejandro" of Che's guerrilla detachment. Raúl Díaz Argüelles died in battle as Chief of the Cuban Army in Angola. They were both very fine men.

And you? What happened next?

Well, when the Revolution triumphed, I was named head of the *Palacio de Bellas Artes*, where I had worked before 1959 as a guide in the Ethnology Salon, as I told you, under Lidia Cabrera.

Through her, I had begun to learn about the world of Afro-Cuban religion. In order to prepare the lectures that we delivered in both English and Spanish — because there were always many foreign visitors as well as Cubans — I had to study intensely and accompany Lidia to many different places both in Havana and in the provinces, listening, taking notes, learning. Of course, all of that shocked my parents greatly.

Was Lidia Cabrera a black woman?

No, she was a white woman from a very good family and very cultured. She was a special friend of Gabriela Mistral, the great Chilean poet, and of Federico García Lorca. García Lorca dedicated one of his poems, *La Casada Infiel*, to her. Lidia carried on the ethnological work begun by Fernando Ortiz. She died in Miami in 199l, but she was a "glory" of Cuban culture, as was Ortiz, of course.

Then why did your family object to your traveling about and studying with her?

Ah, because they didn't want me studying African, negro, things. They didn't say "no", but they didn't like it. They wanted me to go on studying painting or anything else, but not negro things.

What first aroused your interest in Afro-Cuban religion — Lidia Cabrera herself?

She was very important, of course, but I think I was also influenced as a child by our nanny, a black woman of Congo origin. Her name was Isabel Cantero. Her mother had belonged to the slave endowment of the Cantero family of Trinidad in southern Cuba, but Isabel was born in my grandparents' house, and she was given the job of taking care of us children — my sister, brother and me. She always put us to sleep with stories she had learned from her mother, stories of slavery in Cuba and stories of Congo origin. You know, the African peoples never developed a written tradition, but their oral tradition was, and is, very strong. And I'm sure all of that influenced me at a subconscious level. Now, after more than twenty years of inactivity in that field, I've returned to Afro-Cuban investigation.

Actually, they haven't been years of inactivity, exactly, because in all that time, I never stopped collecting information and filing it, but I wasn't actively working in the field or publishing anything. While I was doing agricultural work in Havana Province, I had to move all over the province, and I again began to collect information. I learned a great deal. I collected experiences, conversations, documents, and filed everything away. I've always kept files. But even as I did that, I didn't really assume that I was ever going to return to the field of Ethnography because I considered that my real work was museums, the organization of museums. Before going to work in the country, I had been given the task of reorganizing Havana's museums — Bellas Artes, the Napoleonic Museum, the Museum of Decorative Arts, etc. In fact, though, when I returned from agriculture, I began to work in jewelry-making at the National Bank! (Natalia laughed.)

How on earth did that happen?

Well, it was a field that needed to be developed, and I was assigned to take charge of it. I began by investigating semiprecious stones in our country. I organized the first teams of artisan stonecutters and, working with sculptors and craftsmen who were friends of mine, we began to introduce modern designs into this kind of jewelry. The traditional jewelers in Cuba were opposed to what we were doing, but between 1971 and 1974, we managed to introduce a series of lines that incorporated Cuban designs into our jewelry. Our work was inspired by 19th-century stained-glass windows, which we successfully reproduced in rings, among other things, and we began to use enamel. That had been used before the Revolution but had been lost in the intervening years. So we began to enamel silver but with many difficulties because the old

school of jewelers didn't want to work with modern jewelry. We also did field work and located our own sources of semiprecious stones and went out and got them ourselves.

Did you enjoy that work?

To be honest, I didn't. It was simply a responsibility that was assigned to me, and I did it to the best of my ability. It was an experience, and I think we can learn from every experience. So that was four years of my life in jewelry-making.

My next task was different but similar in some ways. The country had an interesting coin collection that wasn't being exhibited because no one wanted to do the job. I was already working for the *Banco Nacional* on the jewelry project and, of course, I was experienced in museum work, so I was asked to create a Numismatics Museum. It was located first in the old *Banco Gelats*, Havana's oldest bank, that had been exquisitely preserved with all its bronze work and everything. To adapt it, I was assigned a crew of approximately one hundred common prisoners, and that was a tremendous problem, but we managed to inaugurate the Museum on the date scheduled for it.

And that was the end of your numismatic work?

No, no. I continued with it until 1979. I made our numismatics something really beautiful because I brought into it everything from sports to ballet and even preHispanic coinage. I never really liked numismatics, but after I began to integrate it with many different manifestations of art, I did find it interesting. But when I began to have disagreements with the Minister-President of the *Banco Nacional*, he invited me to resign.

So then I spent a year-and-a-half at home, working on my Afro-Cuban archives.

I think we've missed something here. You mentioned that you were put in charge of jewelry-making "after" you returned from working in agriculture. Could we go back to that a moment? How did you happen to go from museums to agriculture in the first place?

Well, that wasn't my choice. As Director of the National Museum, I refused to permit the sale of works of art stored or exhibited there. My opposition to that policy created a conflict with the authorities who were over me, and I was fired. So I was sent to work in agriculture. That was a period when people who got into trouble for one reason or another were "demoted" to agriculture.

Did you actually work in the fields?

Oh, yes. I planted and helped to harvest. I spent almost 2-1/2 years in the fields, then I was given other types of work. Altogether, I spent 5-1/2 years in agriculture. For example, I was put in charge of citrus-fruit production in the province of Havana. Then I went to what was called the Supplies Command Post for Agriculture, that did the planning and handled agricultural supplies. And finally, I went to the Nazareno Command Post to help in the effort to reach a 10-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970, the biggest ever, but that wasn't achieved.

Was that an important failure for the country?

I think so. It was going to be historic, and tremendous resources were poured into it to make it a success. Anyway, a record harvest of some eight million tons was reached, and the failure, at least, helped make the Government realize that many things were wrong, and some attempts were made to correct them.

What were some of the things that were wrong, for example?

Above all, that the top levels of government were being misinformed by people who were in charge of many of the vital sectors of the economy. It was then, around the end of 1971 and the beginning of 1972, that the process of government institutionalization began, and that initiated a whole new stage in the revolutionary process.

Are you a member of the Party?

I was made a member of the Party because of my pre-Revolution underground activities, but later, in 1975, I was "kicked out."

And why were you "kicked out"?

Let's say I wasn't disciplined enough. You know, Party members are expected to be very disciplined.

To return to your personal activities, after your work in agriculture, you went to jewelry-making and then numismatics and, finally, you spent a year-and-a-half at home, working on your Afro-Cuban archives. What then?

At the end of that time, I was asked to promote the National Theater that had just been opened. As you can imagine, I had no experience in either promotion or theater, but that also turned out to be interesting because, really, if you know how to live life fully and refuse to allow yourself to be frightened or unhappy about doing something you don't know how to do, almost anything has its interesting side.

At the same time, I started advising young art and theater instructors on everything Afro-Cuban. Then several theater directors and also film directors suggested that I write a book so that they wouldn't have to come to me with every question. Since I'd never written a book, I didn't even know how to begin, but then I decided to organize it in the same way I organized information for theater directors. That was how *Los Orishas en Cuba* was written. I was astonished when it was reviewed in *The New York Times*.

That book was a tremendous best-seller in Cuba. People say it's impossible to find a copy in the bookshops. Has your most recent book had the same success?

Yes, and that one I presented in Miami. It's called *Ituti: Death Rituals in Afro-Cuban Religions*.

The result of all this is that I've retired in order to devote myself entirely to writing and, right now, I'm working on four books at the same time! Actually, finished or in the works, I have eight books on Afro-Cuban subjects with three co-authors: Carmen González, Mario López and Valentine Ponce. Besides that, you know, I'm constantly being asked to give lectures, and their preparation always takes time.

What energy!

I can tell you I work very hard. I work as if I had to punch a time clock. I get up at 6:30, do what I have to do in the house and, by 8 o'clock, I'm at my typewriter. That's from Monday through Friday because, on weekends, this house is full of visitors —newspaper people, foreigners, people from television, a stream of people! Today has been a relatively peaceful day because I've had only eight visitors. There are often from twelve to eighteen. You've no idea!

Perhaps you need a social secretary?

Well, I need many things! But really, you can't imagine what this house is like. I even get people from the United States and Europe, so it's hard for me to find time to work.

Couldn't you establish fixed visiting days?

That's very difficult because, you know, telephones in Cuba are so often out-of-order, people simply show up at my door and, once they've come, it's hard to refuse to see them.

You are so sought-after, of course, because of your books.

Yes, of course. It's amazing the interest that exists in everything Afro-Cuban, especially Afro-Cuban religion.

Why do you think that is?

I think there's a general interest in Cuba. People want to know more about it and, especially, they want to know why it's different from the rest of Latin America. And the African element in Cuba has a great deal to do with that. There are a number of aspects of Cuban history and its social experience that make it unique, different from the other countries of Latin America, even though we share the same language and the part of our culture that derives from Spain.

We'd like to know about that, too. What makes Cuba unique?

Its people, of course. Almost all people are ethnically mixed, but it's possible that Cubans are the most polyethnic people on earth. That's why we have such a wide variety of physical types! First of all, there was a frequent mixture between whites and blacks, beginning with the Spaniards who mated with black slave women and created a very large mulatto population. But the Spaniards, themselves, as we know, are an amalgam of peoples and, besides, our first immigrants from Spain came mainly from southern Andalusia, with its mixture of Jews, Arabs and Spaniards. Later came the immigrants from Galicia and the Basque country and from the Canary Islands, which formed a kind of bridge between western Europe and Africa.

But at the same time, for some three hundred years, Cuba was the gathering point for the ships of the powerful Spanish fleet that dominated trade with America. The fleet met here before it separated to sail to Veracruz in Mexico and to Cartagena de Indias in Colombia. A third part of the fleet sent its men to the Pacific port of El Callao in Peru, although they had to cross the Isthmus of Panama by land to reach it. Then the ships regrouped in Cuba before returning to Spain. That fleet was a kind of floating Tower of Babel because its crews were made up of adventurers and fortune-seekers from all over Europe and all over the world, and the ships spent four or five months a year here!

But very, very important, too, was the ethnic diversity of the Africans who were torn away from their homes and families and brought to Cuba as slaves. The white man says "negro" and lumps all black people together, but the differences between these peoples were often greater than the differences between a European and an African. Unlike the other Antilles, the south of the United States and Brazil — the other big slave-importing areas of America — Cuba received slaves from hundreds of different ethnic groups with greatly differing levels of cultural development.

For example, the Dahomeyan people from what is now the Republic of Benin, the Yoruba from Nigeria, and the Congos and Angolas, all from the West African coast, were highly cultured people. Very few people from southern Africa — the southern part of what today is Angola, Namibia, Zaire and South Africa — were brought to Cuba, but literally hundreds of other African cultures were transported here. In Cuba, where they all found themselves in the same tragic situation as enslaved people, the more developed cultures totally absorbed the others and created what we know now as the Afro-Cuban culture and, of course, religions.

Would it be correct to say that the Afro-Cuban religion is a syncretization of the Catholic and African religions?

No. Not at all. There was never any syncretism here between Catholicism and the African religions. They kept their own mythology, beliefs and practices. And they have kept them so pure that they still worship the deities their ancestors worshipped hundreds of years ago. Knowledgeable Africans who come here today are amazed to find that the Afro-Cuban religion is still faithful to the African deities of four and five hundred years ago that no longer exist in Africa. And the orthodox Congo and Yoruba languages that have been lost in Africa have been preserved and are still used here.

This is another of the ways in which Cuba is different from the rest of Latin America. The Catholic Church achieved something quite incredible in Latin America, where it managed to impose its ideology on very advanced civilizations with highly organized cultures based on powerful state religions and mythologies of their own — the Inca, the Maya, the Aztec. In Cuba, no such civilization or state religion existed. The native peoples of Cuba had already been almost exterminated, which is why Africans were brought to work the plantations and do other work.

But the Church underestimated the black people and the strength of the African religions, which resulted in these people protecting their religion by deception. From their earliest times in Cuba, they disguised their deities by bestowing upon them, as second names, the names of Catholic saints. But in reality, they worshipped their own African gods under their real African names, not under the fictitious names. In that way, since they seemed to accept the external symbols of the Catholic religion, the white masters left them alone to worship in their own way and in their own places.

Given such secrecy, how have you been able to learn about the Afro-Cuban religion in order to study it and write about it. Do you actually practice it?

Yes, of course. There's no other way to learn about it. From the outside, you will never know anything. It's much more complex than anyone could imagine, and it has no bible you can go to, as Christians have, to try to understand it. Remember, it's all based on oral tradition. You have to learn about it gradually, by word of mouth, by research, but above all, research *inside* the religion. You have to study history — that's basic — and you have to know other religions. And after all that, you have to try to bring everything together coherently, because from twenty or fifty informants, you can get a hundred versions of a single story. And then you have to find the version that is coherent with all that you've studied and with all that you've learned.

One of the books I'm working on now is precisely a comparative analysis of the Christian Old Testament and Afro-Cuban mythology. I'm doing it with Mario López, and it's a very difficult task, enormous! I've already compiled all the information, but before I continue with that, I have to finish the book I'm doing together with Carmen González on spiritualism in Cuba. Then I'll begin with the Afro-Cuban Old Testament.

You're going back to beginnings.

Insofar as possible, yes, because even Afro-Cuban believers here are ignorant of the history of their religion in Africa and even of the history of their religion in Cuba. They need to be acquainted with the history of Cuba, of the development of its various social and economic processes.

We'll look forward to reading your new books.

Well, let's see how long it takes to finish them, because with all the problems we have now and, especially, with so many power outages, it has become harder than ever to write.

Precisely with all the difficulties nowadays, Natalia, do you ever regret having stayed in Cuba?

No, I don't regret having stayed in Cuba. This is my country, my homeland, and I fought for it. I certainly don't regret that.

Still, would it be correct to say that you are far from happy about the present situation?

I can't imagine that anyone could possibly be happy about the present situation. But I'm sure that, in one way or another, sooner or later, we'll overcome the difficulties.

NOTES:

- ¹ Antonio Maceo. One of Cuba's two most important Generals in its wars of independence against Spain, respected and revered as the "Bronze Titan."
- ² Camagüey. A central Cuban province devoted primarily to cattle-raising and sugar plantations.
- ³ Fernando Ortiz. Important Cuban ethnographer and historian, considered the father of Cuban ethnography.
- ⁴ Lidia Cabrera. Outstanding Cuban ethnographer.
- ⁵ Vilma Espín. Heroine of the insurrection against Batista, subsequently the wife of Raúl Castro, sister-in-law of Fidel Castro, and president of the Federation of Cuban Women.
- ⁶ Directorio Revolucionario. A revolutionary movement that played an important role in the insurrection against the Batista dictatorship.
- ⁷ José Antonio Echevarría. Widely popular Roman-Catholic president of the Cuban Federation of University Students and one of the leaders of the *Directorio Revolucionario* until his assassination in 1957 by forces of the Batista military government.
- ⁸ 15th-Precinct Police Station. Infamous for the tortures that took place there and the number of persons who disappeared after being taken there during the Batista regime.

CONCHITA FREYRE DE ANDRADE

Known for her beauty as a young woman, Conchita was 29 when Fidel Castro's revolutionary government came to power. Though she is now in her sixties, the mother of five children and the grandmother of five, her vivaciousness is still that of a much younger person.

Can you tell us about your family background first of all?

I come from a very patriotic family. For as long as I can remember, dinner-table conversation at my parents' home revolved around the subject of Cuba, and it still does today in my house.

My paternal grandfather, Fernando Freyre de Andrade, was a General in our War of Independence against Spain, but my favorite member of the family was his youngest daughter, María Teresa, my father's sister. She was also a patriot and became almost as well known as her famous father. From the time she was very young, in the 1930s, she participated along with one of her uncles, Gonzalo Freyre de Andrade, in the struggle against the dictator Machado. Gonzalo was a Congressman and a lawyer who defended persons arrested for actions against the dictatorship. Finally, an order was issued from the *Palacio* for the extermination of a list of persons, among them Gonzalo Freyre. Through the connivance of a new servant in the house, the killers entered Gonzalo's home, where his two brothers were also present. Since the assassins didn't know which of them was Gonzalo, they killed all three brothers. That tragedy affected the whole family deeply, including, of course, my Aunt María Teresa.

She went abroad, to France, but returned to Cuba after Machado was overthrown. Later, when the political party known as the *Ortodoxos* was formed in the 1940s, she joined it and became a candidate for Senator for that party. She was a university professor and the only woman candidate. Seven other professors, all men, were also candidates, and people referred to them as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"!

The *Ortodoxos* had been formed by people, including many intellectuals, who wanted to get rid of corruption in government in Cuba. Their motto was "*Vergüenza contra dinero*" (Integrity versus money), because until then it had been notorious that most people who entered politics did so only to get rich. Everyone was confident that the *Ortodoxos* would win the 1952 elections. Batista was apparently sure of it, too, because he didn't wait. Instead he carried out a *coup d' etat*, making himself dictator.

Of course, María Teresa and all the other *Ortodoxos* immediately began working against him. Then, when the Presidential Palace was attacked, Batista blamed them. Actually, it became known immediately that the attack had been planned and carried out by another organization, the *Directorio Revolucionario*, but it gave Batista an excuse to intensify the political persecution of the *Ortodoxos*. Then the prominent *Ortodoxo* leader, Dr. Pelayo Cuervo, was brutally murdered by Batista's secret police and the situation became so dangerous that many *Ortodoxo* leaders took political asylum, including María Teresa. She again left for France, because we have family there, but this time she went by way of Mexico. I remember that she arrived at our house and the Mexican ambassador came personally to pick her up and drive her to the Embassy.

Were you active at all against Batista?

No. My sister Elena and my brother-in-law participated in the struggle, but in spite of my loathing of Batista, I never became involved. I'd married young and already had three children, so that I was only an onlooker. Then came the victory of the Revolution led by Fidel Castro, and I must confess that, despite the political atmosphere in which I'd grown up, I never felt drawn to the Revolution in its early years.

For one thing, from the beginning, I rejected the idea of so much power in the hands of one person.

But part of the reason may also have been that I'd grown up in a very bourgeois atmosphere — although my parents weren't wealthy — among very wealthy relatives and friends, and until my marriage, I'd devoted my time much more to social life than to any intellectual activity. My sisters, Marta and Elena, were always much more intellectual than I.

Would you say that your religion was also an impediment to your accepting the Revolution?

No. My mother was a very religious woman. She went to Communion almost daily, but she was entirely in favor of the Revolution. And I, personally, never linked my religious feelings to the Church as such, as an institution, because I never completely approved of the Church's attitude to society. When I was fifteen, for example, I refused to enter the *Hijas de María*—something like the Catholic equivalent to our present Young Communist League—because I found the statutes hypocritical. Everyone accepted them, but nobody observed them. Besides, the Church here was always linked to the upper classes, with no visible social consciousness, and we had been reared in an intellectual atmosphere in which social concerns were always present. So religion was not a factor in my feeling about the Revolution.

Was your husband's background similar to yours?"

My husband's family had a great deal more money than mine. His family was very well off, and his father, a very honest and respected lawyer and a partner in one of Cuba's most important law firms, was prominent in society. His mother was from a family of *colonos*, owners of sugarcane plantations. In his youth, my father-in-law had participated to some extent in the struggle against Machado, but after that, he never again became involved in politics.

Early in the Revolution, when there was a lot of speculation about whether the Revolution would respect the rights of parents over their children, known here as *patria potestad*, my father-in-law sent his youngest son, who was just 18 years old, away to study in the States. But then he decided that it was necessary to be near the boy to look after him, and he left for the States, too. But it was a terribly unfortunate decision. He wrote us letters that showed how emotionally disturbed he was — a man with so much equanimity — and, ten months later, he died there of a heart attack.

Emilio, my husband, who is also a lawyer and worked with his father before the Revolution, accepted the Revolution, I'd say, cautiously and gradually. We made a trip to Mexico in 1959, and he read a book on Mexican history that, I think, helped to arouse his interest in the Cuban Revolution. Since then, he's been a firm supporter.

But, for whatever reasons, as I said, it took me a long time to sympathize with the Revolution. That time came in 1973 with the assassination of President Salvador Allende¹ in Chile, a man who'd believed in the idea of gradual, peaceful change. I had always maintained that progress should be through evolution, not revolution. I still believed that changes could be effected in Latin America, including Cuba, through a democratic electoral process, as the *Ortodoxos* had proposed. But when I saw what happened to a man who had those same ideas and tried to put them into practice, I began to realize how naive I'd been.

Meanwhile, my children were growing up and were, inevitably, involved in the life of their country.

You say "inevitably," but many people of your class were leaving Cuba. Did you ever consider taking that step?

I suppose I must have thought of it in the early years with so many friends leaving or planning to leave. I remember that one of my friends and I used to comment that "everyone" was leaving. Then one day she and I went downtown to do some Christmas shopping. There was still plenty of merchandise in the shops, and the streets and stores were jammed with people. She looked at me and said, "Concha, have you noticed? There's no one left!" And I said, "No, everyone's gone." And we both laughed. It was just our small world that was mostly affected.

But I never seriously considered leaving. First, because I've always thought that this is my country, and the country is part of me and I am part of the country. And I've always known through the members of my family who've lived in exile, because of the dictators Machado or Batista, how they always longed for their country. My father studied abroad, at Cornell University, for four years but always regretted it. He said that, when you're away for so long, you always feel in some way a stranger in your own country when you return.

In the second place, I don't really know any other country where I'd like to live. Most people who leave go to the United States because they think it's the ideal place. It wouldn't be for me. And Miami, of course, would never have been my choice because I never liked it before the Revolution. It's not my style at all.

So you remained in Cuba and gradually began to accept the Revolution?

Yes. After the events in Chile, I began to change and to appreciate the good things the Revolution was doing — the tremendous advances in public health, the great educational effort that was being made. That was something I'd always felt very strongly about — that, in order to progress, a country needs a solid educational policy. I also saw, for the first time, efforts being made to develop the country as a whole so that it would no longer have to depend on a single product, a single agricultural crop. Many people criticize the government now, saying that if it had concentrated more on developing agriculture, we wouldn't have the critical food problem we have now. But I think the policy of building an industrial infrastructure was correct. The problem is that our development was interrupted by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which had been buying our sugar at a good price — and what we considered was a fair price. But who could have foreseen that the Soviet Union was going to collapse?

No. Not even the capitalist countries foresaw it.

It was unimaginable. But creating an industrial and scientific base that the country had never had before seems to me correct. Thanks to this policy we now have all our highly developed research centers and thousands of young, well-trained scientists searching for by-products of sugarcane, creating new pharmaceutical products and all the advances in medicine that are now available here. These are things that aren't typical of underdeveloped, purely agricultural countries. In other words, a qualitative change has taken place in Cuba. It's the kind of change that's needed in so many other Third-World countries.

Many who criticize Fidel Castro forget that it was his vision of the future of this country that made possible all the scientific-industrial development that is the only thing that can guarantee a better future for the nation. I remember that, at the beginning, I used to criticize so much emphasis on science because I thought that what the country needed was more *cultural* development.

I remember one day when my oldest son and I were walking past the School of Letters at the University of Havana, I made that comment, and I was shocked when he answered, "Those are a bunch of idiots!" I said, "No, no one who can create is an idiot. Those who create through literature or art are superior in some ways to the rest of us who don't create anything new." Now, of course, I see how clear-minded Fidel Castro was in laying this strong scientific base for the country, because of course, scientists create, too. And it's this vision and his courage that make

one admire him. Some people think it's time for him to retire, and it's true that no one can go on forever, but he's very much respected abroad — for whatever reason: fear, admiration, whatever. And of course, here within the country, with very few exceptions, he's deeply trusted.

Several new, younger people have been brought into important posts in the government recently.

Yes. And Catholics and other religious people were elected to the national legislature in the last elections. Actually, there's no basic conflict between socialism and Catholicism. Unfortunately, the Party didn't understand that in the early years and shunted Catholics aside from most responsible posts. The result was that many — among them, younger Catholics with leftist sympathies, who actually agreed with most of what the Revolution was doing — left because they felt totally rejected.

Well, there was a tremendous amount of extremism of all kinds in those first years that antagonized and alienated people. That happens in all revolutions, of course, but that was another reason why I didn't feel sympathetic. For example, there was a woman called "La China" who was in charge of housing for all of *La Playa* municipality. She was a really horrible person, and yet she was a functionary of the Revolutionary Government! She had apparently fought in the Sierra Maestra, but I've never understood why she was allowed to do the things she did to offend people.

And then there was the unjust treatment of my Aunt María Teresa while she was head of the National Library...

This was the aunt who had taken asylum in France?

Yes. She returned to Cuba after Batista was overthrown and the Revolution came to power, and she was immediately offered the post of head of the National Library. In fact, she had been performing different services for the Revolutionary Government while she was still in France. I remember that one of them was collecting information that Cuba needed on international norms for handling war prisoners. Anyway, she was happy to accept the post and did wonderful things with the National Library during the years she headed it — from 1959 to 1967. She set up a national network of public libraries that hadn't existed before and a library-trailer system that served smaller, rural communities. But aside from that, she made the Library not only a depository of books but a cultural center, with lectures, courses and many activities and departments. She brought in intellectuals and poets such as Eliseo Diego, Cintio Vitier and many others to do research but insisted that they also have time to devote to their literary work, to writing. But then she began to have problems with the Communist Youth organization there at the Library. They demanded that everyone work a full 8-hour schedule, even though those who worked only 5 hours were paid for only 5 hours. And then there were other demands that she felt she couldn't accept, and they finally managed to oust her. She was assured she would be given another post, but that never happened.

That was part of the extremism of that period. Later, the government publicly recognized that she had been unjustly treated. Articles were written about her and ceremonies were held in her honor, but María Teresa had already died by then, a very sad woman. She'd been removed in 1967 from a job she'd loved and in which she knew she was enormously useful, and she died in 1975. I attended the ceremonies and accepted the honors in her name, although her husband didn't approve. He felt bitter and thought we should ignore them. But she had never been a resentful person, and I knew that, had she lived, she'd have considered the tribute marvelous. She had never stopped considering herself a revolutionary. She was a wonderful, exceptional person.

Can you tell us something about your childhood?

I grew up in a large family. My paternal grandmother, two aunts, an uncle, my father and mother, my two sisters, my brother and I lived in a big, old-fashioned, typically Cuban household. We weren't rich. The family on both sides, the Freyre de Andrades and the Pedros had been owners of sugar mills in the past, but that had all been lost. In spite of that, we moved in a circle of wealthy people. My paternal grandmother, who was orphaned as a child, had been raised by a very rich aunt and uncle who reared her together with their son, Juan, her cousin, as brother and sister. Since Juan was a millionaire and also our father's godfather and we were our grandmother's only grandchildren, both of them showered attention on the four of us — my sisters, my brother and I. Anything we wanted, we got. So my childhood was very comfortable and happy.

I remember that, during the Second World War when France was invaded by the Germans, one of my father's cousins brought her two grandchildren to Cuba to escape the war. She owned what was probably the most elegant mansion in Havana's Vedado section — it still is — and had an incredible number of servants. While they lived here, for five years or so, we children spent many hours in that house, where elaborate, formal dinners were served every night. We went with our cousins to Varadero Beach and to their country house and farm. But it was from that family that I learned that money doesn't guarantee happiness. They weren't really happy, and our French cousins always liked to be at our house in spite of the fact that they were so rich.

So that was the social milieu in which we moved. We went to the best clubs and attended the theater and concerts. My mother was always concerned that we practiced sports and went to the beach. My Aunt Conchita Freyre de Andrade, María Teresa's sister, was a founding member of the Pro-Arte Society that sponsored the best concerts. We had a lifetime membership and always went.

When I was fifteen, I was sent to study for a year at a Catholic boarding school in New Jersey to perfect my English. I was fond of the nuns (although I found them too narrow-minded) and I got along well with the other girls. At first, no one believed I was a "Latin girl" — apparently because I was blonde and very elegantly dressed.

You didn't fit their stereotype of a "Latin girl"?

Evidently not. Anyway, I only stayed there a year. My sister Marta, who was studying in the States while I was there, graduated later from Smith College and then married an American. Actually, they had met here in Cuba and used to come back for visits, but she's lived in the States ever since.

Has she returned since the Revolution?

She came once early in the Revolution. It was at Carnival time. I remember that because there was an incident when she was in a convertible in the Carnival parade and caused a commotion when she took out a package of American cigarettes! That was a time when *Cuba sí*, *yanquis no* was practically a national watchword, and almost any American symbol was rejected. But the incident passed quickly. Then she came twice after that, when our parents died. Before the Revolution, however, they used to come down every year.

What about your other sister?

Elena and her husband, Ricardo, were both active in the underground movement against Batista. Ricardo was a young architect at the time and head of a revolutionary nucleus that was helping to prepare a general strike that had been planned by the urban leaders of the 26th of July Movement. When the strike failed, Ricardo was left in a dangerously vulnerable position because he had visited prominent business people and industrialists, getting support for it. Because of that situation, he and Elena left for Venezuela. When the Revolution triumphed, they returned and Ricardo continued his work as an architect. His design for Havana's School of Art was so

original that it made a tremendous impact. Articles about it and photographs were published all over the world.

But after a time, he began to feel "suffocated" in Cuba because he didn't find enough possibilities for expressing his ideas and opinions in his field. He also disagreed with the policy of building economical housing for workers that was, often, totally lacking in esthetic value when, for the same cost, he said, attractive buildings could be constructed. He and Elena finally left after he was offered a fellowship in France, and they've remained there. In recent years, he has designed a beautiful school and a beautiful workers' neighborhood in Paris. But now he has become a Catholic and his views are very conservative. He became a Catholic when their only son was dying of leukemia. Actually, Ricardo never liked living in Cuba. He adores Paris and feels perfectly at home there. He's a gourmet, and perhaps that has something to do with it. Elena? I think she's happy in Paris, too, but I know she's never stopped caring deeply about Cuba.

You said your mother sympathized with the Revolution. What about your father?

Yes, they both sympathized, but my mother, especially, was always more progressive in her ideas. My father — a university professor, a professor of English — was highly respected. In the early years, when many professors were removed, he was kept on in his post, but he was ill and unable to work in the last years of his life.

I believe that my mother was a real leftist Catholic without ever knowing it. She belonged to an organization known as the Lyceum Lawn Tennis Club that started as a social club but evolved into a group with social and cultural aims that became known simply as The Lyceum. There she organized a group of more than thirty women who made layettes for the babies of poor women who gave birth in hospitals and had no clothing for their children. She devoted almost every afternoon to this work.

So your mother's "leftism" was based on her social consciousness?

Yes. We often commented on the different social stages we've gone through. I remember a house I used to visit that was the home of the parents of Elena Mederos. Elena was the first Minister of Social Welfare of the Revolutionary Government, although she later left the country. Before the Revolution, her family used to serve hot lunches every day to a line of ragged and dirty beggars, many of them ill. The family, of course, was convinced they were doing something tremendously worthwhile.

Elena belonged to another generation and saw the situation differently. As one of the leaders of The Lyceum, she tried to solve the problems of individuals. "What do you need to support yourself? A sewing machine? Here's a sewing machine for you. To be cured of your illness, so that you can work? We'll cure you." That was a second stage — social work. The third stage is the present one in which everyone has a right to the essentials of life and equal opportunities, without charity from anyone. Now there's no such thing as a beggar in our country. Of course, there are still poor people, but not desperately poor people, and no one has to beg for the essentials.

The very wise man we call Cuba's Apostle, José Martí, said that the wellbeing of all the people is preferable to the opulence of a few, and I absolutely believe that. So I think the Revolution has done many things that deserve great credit even though they may not be perfect. But if it had waited to make them perfect, perhaps nothing would have been done, who knows?

What criticisms would vou make of what has been done?

Oh, many! Public services have never been good, and of course, they're much worse now because of the economic situation. There have been and are fiascos, such as the food program right now. There's no doubt about it; this has been a failure so far, even granting that many unforeseeable problems have contributed to it.

It may be that you can't centralize everything in a country, even a small country the size of Cuba. Maybe you need to centralize some basic things and leave others decentralized.

But in any event, you can't judge a society only by its errors; you have to see it in its totality. And, for me, on the whole, this society is much more just than what we had before. No society is perfect. But, in my opinion, for an underdeveloped country to have done what Cuba has is an achievement that can't be denied.

Many people find it hard to believe, for example, that Cuba has no serious crime problem and no drug problem. I remember a dinner I attended in the States a few years ago when I was visiting my sister Marta. The conversation turned to drugs, and one of the guests asked me about the situation in Cuba. When I answered that Cuba has no drug problem, he simply stared at me, and the whole table fell silent. It was embarrassing, since he obviously didn't believe me. I didn't insist.

Of course, we have other problems. It's tremendously depressing, for example, to go to the shops and see that there is nothing, nothing on the shelves. But the trouble is that we're engaged in a war without war, an undeclared war of the U.S. against us. The U.S. Government has always, even before the Revolution, wanted to tell us what we should think and how we should run our country and who should run it. We think that is our business and not theirs, especially since everyone knows that the U.S. supported the corrupt and brutal dictators Machado and Batista, just as it supported Somoza in Nicaragua, Stroessner in Paraguay, Pinochet in Chile, etc. etc.

What can you tell us about your children?

Well, we're very proud of them. Four are engineers and they were all excellent students. Two of them represented Cuba abroad in international mathematics and physics competitions, one in Romania and one in Germany. When they returned, although they were offered scholarships abroad, they said they wouldn't like to study in another country, so they all continued their studies in Cuba. Perhaps they were influenced by my father who, as I told you, studied in the States as a youth and always said it had been a mistake because it disconnected him from his friends and his country.

Our oldest son, Emilio Arturo, was president of the Federation of University Students at Havana university. After he graduated as an industrial engineer, he went to work at the big KTP sugarcane harvesting machine plant in Holguín in eastern Cuba and, later, he was named director of the plant. Then he was brought to Havana as a vice-minister of the Metal and Machinery Ministry, but he insisted he wanted to be more directly involved in production and not just sit in an office and, as a result, he's always very, very busy and always traveling about.

Our second son, Enrique, studied electrical engineering, specialized in electronics, and immediately went into the computing field. At first he was working in hardware, but now he's working in software related to hydrology.

Two of our daughters, Teresa and Mercedes, graduated in automatized systems engineering. At the time of their graduation, the Armed Forces were calling for highly qualified engineers, and both of them now work in their field as civilian employees in the Armed Forces.

Our third daughter, Conchita, has not been well for several years and had to drop her studies of biochemistry at the university.

Emilio Arturo, Teresita and Mercy are married and, so far, have five children, our grandchildren.

Life is very, very hard now for young people. Before the Revolution, young people from well-to-do families could set up their own home when they married and furnish and equip it, but now that's very difficult for all young people because of all the scarcities. So they have to get along with very little. Even so, all five of our children are perfectly identified with the Revolution.

If they feel identified with the Revolution, it must be that they feel confident about its future. Do you feel that way, too?

Yes, of course, although no one knows exactly what that future is going to be. Evidently, we're at the most critical moment of the Revolution, if not of the nation, right now. But if the United States leaves us alone, I think we can come out of it. In 1959, we started creating a new economy almost from zero. Now, since 1990, we've had to start again, because that economy was destroyed. But of course, this time it isn't from zero because of the hospitals and schools, the factories and research institutes and the qualified workforce that have been created.

Meanwhile, life here is undoubtedly very difficult, and many people want to emigrate — which is apparently the purpose of the Torricelli Bill. But thousands of people from Mexico and other countries want to emigrate to the United States, too, and they live in capitalist countries! They aren't "fleeing from socialism". Like Cubans who are thinking of emigrating, they want to improve their economic situation.

But surely some people leave Cuba for political reasons, too?

In the early years, the emigration was almost entirely political — people who were afraid of socialism or who were simply opposed to it and, of course, the supporters of Batista who were afraid of reprisals. But for a long time now, most of those who emigrate hope to live better; the motive is economic.

Everyone here knows that, and the government is clearly trying very, very hard to find solutions to overcome the crisis. Well, the whole world needs to find new solutions. I think it really can't go on much longer as it is. The differences between developed and underdeveloped countries are greater every day. There are really only two worlds now, not three, and every day there is less understanding between the two. I think much of the blame for this lies on the press and other means of communication, which are too tied to their own social system. Maybe the means of communication would have to be placed in the hands of something like the United Nations to guarantee at least an approximation to objective information.

Then there is all the misinformation that's directed against us. I had an experience in France last year that made me feel actually sick, physically ill! *Le Monde* published a review of a book written in the United States that claims that the system of psychiatric care in Cuba is used as a means of repression against persons who criticize the Revolution! I've often thought there should be international laws against libel, just as there are laws against it within every country. But people publish whatever they like about us with absolute impunity, and others who have no way of knowing about Cuba never learn the truth.

My sisters, who live abroad — one in Wyoming and one in Paris — didn't know that we've had free and honest elections here for years. They didn't know anything about the scientific or industrial development of the country. They'd heard only negative things about Cuba.

One reason may be that negative news is considered more newsworthy than reports of positive, every-day activities. Just ask yourself how much "positive" news you normally read or hear about any country. It's the sensational, the lurid, the tragic and the calamitous that are sure to make the news.

Yes, I know that's true of the capitalist press, although it isn't true of the Cuban press. Ours certainly has other faults — one of them that it probably goes too far in the opposite direction — that is, of printing only the promising and the hopeful, but I prefer it to the other.

How would you summarize your view of Cuba's situation right now and its future?

The collapse of the Soviet Union, combined with the U.S. blockade, especially after the enactment of the Torricelli Bill, have been blows that I think would have totally demoralized any country with a weaker leadership than Cuba's. In any event, it's impossible to know what is going to happen. Cuba has been badly hurt and only time will tell if it will be able to recover.

What I do think, though, is that the country will never return to what existed here before. I don't believe it would be possible. Too much that is good has been accomplished.

NOTES:

¹In September, 1973, Chile's democratically elected government was overthrown by a military coup led by Augusto Pinochet, during which President Salvador Allende was killed in an Armed Forces assaulton the presidential palace. The coup led to almost 17 years of military dictatorship under Pinochet.

DATES OF THE INTERVIEWS

LAURA GOMEZ TARAFA 1994 EMILIA DEL CAMPO 1994 CECILIA PONCE DE LEON 1976, u

CECILIA PONCE DE LEON 1976, update 1994 GLORIA GONZALEZ 1976, update 1994

MARGOT DEL POZO 1994 NATALIA BOLIVAR 1994 CONCEPCION FREYRE DE ANDRADE 1994

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marjorie Moore is an American who moved to Cuba in 1950 with her Cuban businessman husband. Prior to 1959, she led the privileged, upper-class life described by most of the women in the present book. In the early 1960s, she entered the field of language teaching at a leading Cuban medical university where, for many years, she headed that university's Postgraduate-English Department and teacher-training program. She holds a Ph.D. in Pedagogy and is the author of several books and articles on diverse aspects of language teaching.

Adrienne Hunter is a Canadian who holds a doctorate in Applied Linguistics from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. She has been living in Cuba since 1972, when she arrived in Havana to work as an English-language specialist in a postgraduate engineering programme funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. Later named Visiting Professor in the Postgraduate-English Department of Havana's medical university, she subsequently became advisor to the Ministry of Public Health on the training of its more than 500 English teachers nationwide. In 1993, she became Principal of the International School of Havana, the only independent English-language school in Cuba for the children of diplomats and other foreign residents.

Havana, Cuba. March 1996

SEVEN WOMEN by MARJORIE MOORE and ADRIENNE RUNTER

In this timely book, Marjorie Moore and Adrienne Kunter present their carefully constructed interviews with seven of Cuba's most interesting women. The profiles of the women emerge with singular clarity, and their opinions and views read as a delightful suprise and an informative challenge.

For these are no ordinary women in the sense that the Guban egalitarian system envisions the citizens of its republic. For these were largely aristocratice women, and they chose to stay in Guba after the revolution when the majority of their compatrious from a similar background did not. Their stories are fascinating and well worth reading. This not a book to rush, it is a delightful excusion through Guban culture, to be savoured, read and re-read...

