

Dear friends,

We want to congratulate the New Mexico Pedro Pans for a successful 50th Reunion in Albuquerque, NM this past month of May. Once again I felt the bond between all of us is alive and well. I want to thank all the New Mexico Pedro Pans that made all of us feel at home and shared their joy with the greater Pedro Pan family that we all belong to. Nothing compares to that feeling of "belonging" that is so special and important for us Pedro Pan. Having being stripped of that feeling at a young age under dramatic circumstances, we cherish and appreciate it much more than can be put down with words. All our experiences are UNIQUE and at the same time, they are ONE. Please see more information on this wonderful 50th Reunion below.

Don't miss the story about Msgr. Walsh, written from the perspective of a non Pedro Pan, a very dear friend to me, that left Cuba in 1980, after being in the UMAP concentration camps in Cuba for over 3 years. His reflections about our dear Monsignor and the impact he had on his life are priceless.

A new section to honor our recently departed parents was long overdue, as our parents are the real heroes of our story. Please send us information about them if they have recently departed us so that we may honor and remember them here.

This month of May has been a bitter sweet month for many of us, as we say good bye to one of our special and very much loved Pedro Pans: Guillermo R. Paz. Guillermo was not only a Pedro Pan but also the loving husband to our Historic Committee Chair and member of the Board of Directors, Carmen Valdivia.

Guillermo made very important contributions to our organization and to all in the Pedro Pan community that will remain as his legacy for all his Pedro Pan brothers/sisters and for future generations to come. He made a creative and beautiful cover for Ideal Magazine in 2010 with a collage of Cuban Passports from fellow Pedro Pans. He collaborated with wife Carmen to make our Official Power Point Presentation: The History of Operation Pedro Pan, and downloaded a you tube version of the original presentation with Cuban music background to commemorate our 50th Anniversary celebrations. He participated in numerous presentations about

The History of Operation Pedro Pan, in Miami-Dade College, Holocaust Museum in Naples, Homeland Security Offices, Medicare Appeal Offices, etc. He was interviewed by The Florida Channel for their Florida Crossroads series last summer (you can see both the Power Point and the Florida Channel video in the Resources tab of our website: www.pedropan.org) He was our Technical Advisor, always ready to jump in and help in whatever was needed. These are just a few of the things in which he contributed because the list is too long to continue. All was done with unselfish generosity and away from the spotlight. He just did it because he WAS a Pedro Pan.

Please take a moment to read Guillermo's story below. It took him a long time to write it... all of us were urging him at the time to hurry up and post it in the Miami Herald's Pedro Pan Network. Guillermo, with his unique personality, didn't rush it at all, he took his time and with unusual wit and sensibility wrote what I think it is one of the most precious Pedro Pan stories, written from the perspective of a young Cuban boy. Another beautiful legacy for all of us to enjoy and remember him. May he rest in peace.

Love,

Carmencita Romanach

***The official Pedro Pan Newsletter of Operation Pedro Pan
Group Inc.***

**OPERATION PEDRO PAN GROUP, INC. (OPPG)
A National Charitable Organization**

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June 2, 2012

Pedro Pan News

In Memoriam



Guillermo R. Paz

July 2, 1950- May 27, 2012

The year was 1958, I was 8 years old and my life from my perspective was good. I had two wonderful parents and a loving sister who was 2 years older than I. My father was a self made man who arrived in Cuba at the age of 14 from Spain and after many years of sacrifices and hard work became the owner of two jewelry stores located in Havana. He

was a very descent and proper Spaniard who taught by example. My mother, who was also raised in Spain, was a very loving and caring mother. She carried an aura of optimism that would radiate and when she smiled the whole room would light up. She was pure sunshine. Her whole world revolved around my sister and I. She always made sure that all of our needs were met. My typical days consisted in getting up in the morning and after having my usual café con leche and Cuban toast I would wait for the school bus in my front porch. The bus would take me to “Las Escuelas Pias de la Vibora” the school that I attended since the first grade. After school I would do my homework then it was playtime or “mataperrear” on the streets! On my block I had a lot friends: Jose Manuel (Tito), Emilito, Paco, Albertico, and Julito. We would play baseball on the streets, make club houses from scrap wood, make and fly our own kites, ride bicycle, have soda cap wars, an occasional fist fight with some guys we called “las ratas” (the rats) down the street, go lizard hunting with our pellet rifles, play marbles, top spinning, making carriolas with old skates, gamble with baseball cards, exchange comic books and the usual hide and seek at night. I could stay out and play until I heard “el cañonazo de las nueve”, which was a canon fired from el Morro at 9:00 p.m., I could stay out that late as long as I kept my end of the deal of not letting my grades fall, which I never did. I always carried a nickel in my pocket for an occasional “Ironbeer”, Coke and or a slice of mortadella from the corner bodega. Almost every weekend and specially during the summer months I would spend my time at the Club Bancario located in Santa Maria del Mar a breathtaking beach with beautiful fine white sand and clear turquoise blue waters located about 12 miles east of Havana along the Via Blanca highway. My price possessions included my Niagara bicycle, my pellet rifle, my marble collection, my Union #5 roller skates, my collection of comic books, and my collection of baseball cards. As I stated before life was good!

1959 started with a lot of fan fare. When Fidel with his barbudos entered Havana I found it fascinating at the beginning. They would show me their weapons and would give me bullets as souvenirs. It was like living in a real adventure movie much like the TV shows that I loved to watch such as The Lone Ranger, Rin Tin Tin, El Zorro, Westerns, and

World War II movies. The fan fare was short-lived. Soon my favorite TV programs were been replaced by public trials resembling the Roman Coliseum with spectators chanting "Paredon" (to the wall) followed by executions by firing squads. I heard of mobs sacking houses of Batista sympathizers. Envy seemed to be running wild in the streets and anyone could label you a Batista sympathizer. Even though my family was not involved in anything that had to do with politics, for the first time in my life I began to sense and feel fear. I remember my father telling me that I shall not repeat anything that I hear in our house to anyone and if someone asks me "whom do you belong to, Batista or Fidel?" my answer shall be "I belong to my Father and Mother". Shortly afterwards the "Comite de Defensa" (Defense Committee) was established in the next block from my house by the most envious undesirable individuals of the neighborhood. One day a member of the "Comite" asked the question that my father had prepared me for and I carefully answered my canned response while my sister, my self-appointed defender, simply told him to go to hell and to stop bothering us. On another occasion another member of the same committee was posting signs stating "Fidel Esta Es Tu Casa" (Fidel This is Your House) all along a masonry wall that fenced our corner house while my sister was carefully removing them and tearing them up behind her. When confronted my sister told her "You are posting the signs on the wrong house, this is not Fidel's house. I know because I live here!" I am pretty sure that we were labeled "Los Gusanos" (the worms) of the neighborhood after that.

As time went on, I was realizing that I was witnessing the beginning of the end of an era similar to watching a video of a flower wilting in fast forward. I still had my nickel in my pocket but there was no ironbeer, coke or mortadella to buy at the bodega and Chiclets were nowhere to be found. People standing in line to buy groceries became a common sight. Even in Varadero you couldn't get Mermelada de Guayaba con queso crema, which was my favorite. My father, who used to sit on the front porch after work reading the newspaper, was now in his bedroom listening to "La Voz de Las Americas" behind closed doors on a short-wave radio in an obvious effort of obtaining unbiased information. The squelching sound emitted from the radio as he tuned-in the station is

unforgettable. One night, I entered his room as he was listening to the radio; he sat me down, turned off the radio and calmly proceeded to explain the theory of communism and its ramifications. I was also told not to worry since the Americans would never allow communism within 90 miles from their shores and that it was all a matter of time before all of this madness would end but that I would be traveling “al norte” (north) in the near future on a temporary basis until the dust settled.

One night while I was playing hide and seek, a half a block away from where I was, someone had placed on the door of the “Comite de Defensa” some anti Fidel propaganda. The “miliciano”(militia) who was in charge of defending his post upon seen the sign ran to the middle of the street with his rifle to see if he could find the guilty party and who does he see running in the street? Me! He then yells, “halt!” Now mind you that I did hear the command to halt but I had been hiding in a bush in front of a house where a very cute girl lived and I thought that it was the girl’s father yelling so I ran even faster towards the “base” which was this huge old tree by the corner bodega. As I am running towards the base, the miliciano raises his rifle has me on his sights and as he squeezes the trigger, I trip on the tree’s roots and fall. By an act of God the bullet flies over my head and strikes the tree. My father who had been sitting in our front porch witnessed the whole event except for the fact that he thought that I had been killed. He ran towards the miliciano, disarmed him and threw him to the ground ready to kill him screaming “he is just a boy” over and over and over. After seen that I was unharmed, he stopped the physical attack on the miliciano but continued with the longest verbal attack that I have ever witnesses. This was the last night that I was allowed to play on the street. The streets, the playground that had been so dear to me, were no longer safe.

I guess that my father knew more than he was letting me know for he decided that we were going to take a trip from “El Cabo de San Antonio to La Punta de Maisi” in other words he wanted me to see all of Cuba before I left and I did.

All Cubans know that October 10th also known as “El Grito de Yara” signifies the day when sugar mill owner Carlos Manuel de Cespedes and his followers proclaimed Cuba’s independence from Spain. To me, it signifies a lot more for it is also the day of my independence from communism. It is the day that I left Cuba. On the morning of Tuesday October 10th, 1961 I took a very slow deliberate walk around my house and the neighborhood paying full attention to every detail with the full knowledge that I wouldn’t be there the next day but little did I know that it would be my last. Back in my room, my mother had been putting the finishing touches packing my luggage, which she had been working on for the last 3 days. As I entered the room she asked me if I wanted to put anything else into the luggage. I figured that I was leaving on a temporary basis so I said no. She then handed me a drawstring bag she had made from an old curtain remnants containing my marble collection and said that she would like for me to take it along. When I asked why, she said, with a half smile, that it would be a good idea. I placed the bag inside my luggage and closed it.

Neatly placed on top of my bed was a new dark blue suit that my mother had bought for the trip. After dressing I looked in the mirror and the reflection that came back was that of a full-grown man like my father. At the time I did not understand that at that moment my childhood had ended and that the reflection was of what I had become. Before leaving the house, my father quizzed me on my home address and on all the phone numbers that I should remember. To this day, these numbers are still engraved in my mind.

The trip to the airport was non eventful mixed with an occasional “mira la vaquita” (look at the cow) bit. Obviously my parents and my sister were trying to mask their feelings by casting a positive tone on the situation. I had mixed fillings. In one hand I was going to the good old USA on a temporary basis, I was going on my first plane ride, and I was ridding myself of all the oppression that existed in Cuba. I was going towards freedom! On the other hand, I was leaving behind my family and everything that I knew towards an unknown.

Once at the airport I was familiar with the routine since we had previously accompanied a neighbor who had departed to Miami about a month before. Since we had arrived early, to kill time, my mother took me to the gift shop and bought me some maracas one with HABANA and the other with CUBA engraved on it. At some point I was told that it was time to enter the glass enclosed gate waiting room also known as “la pecera” (the fishbowl). I knew that this was the point of no return. So with my best stiff upper lip I hugged and kissed my parents and sister goodbye but also made sure that I was the last one to enter. Once inside I could see my parents and sister thru the glass but could no longer talk to them or touch them. Now I knew why it was called the fishbowl. You felt like a silly goldfish! The fishbowl had a Machiavellian physiological effect. You were still in Cuban territory so you were at their mercy while your parents watched but could not defend you. It was the communist’s last insult. As I heard the order to board the plane, my eyesight locked-in on my family who were standing on the other side of the glass doing their best to look cheerful. They hand signaled that they were going to the second floor balcony. I nodded my head, blew them a kiss and entered a room where they opened and inspected my luggage. They didn’t find anything that they wanted to confiscate, which could have been just about anything, so I was released to proceed down the tarmac towards the plane. On my way there I looked back up at the balcony and saw a multitude of people waving white handkerchiefs. I couldn’t point out my family but I knew they were there so for their sake I smiled and waved back as if I had seen them. Once on the plane, I was lucky to get a window seat. I instantly glued my face to the window to see if I could see them but my view was away from the terminal. After what seemed like an eternity, the plane started to taxi towards the runway. On its way there I could see the terminal again this time at a much greater distance but you could still detect all those white handkerchiefs waving good-bye in the distance and I knew that at least one was for me.

After the plane took-off I kept looking out the window attempting to memorize all the splendor of the Cuban landscape but as we approached the coastline an eerie feeling came over me. I was not sure if I would ever see Cuba again or when I would see my

family. The only thing I was sure of was that I was on my own. I was still bouncing those thoughts around in my mind when I heard the announcement that we would be landing in MIA and to please fasten your seatbelts. As I walked down the staircase from the airplane the eerie feeling changed to a sense of accomplishment and relief for I was finally in the USA and free from all of the communist oppression. I took a long deep breath savoring my freedom and proceeded towards the terminal. There, someone led me to a small sterile room containing some chairs, a desk, and an American flag on a pole standing by the corner. Hanging on the wall behind the desk was a large framed picture of President Kennedy. Alone in the room I kept looking at the flag noticing that both the Cuban and the American flags were red, white and blue. The Cuban represented my homeland but this one symbolized my freedom. I was still admiring that beautiful flag when a black man entered the room and said something to me in English. I responded "me no spic ingli". After he realized that I had no idea of what he was saying, he smiled, gave me a pack of Juicy Fruit chewing gum then left the room. The next person to enter was a friend of my family, Serafin, which I immediately recognized. After some small talk, he explained that my family had made arrangements for him to pick me up at the airport and to take me to a camp called Kendall. The word camp sounded great so I said fine lets go.

I left with him to claim my luggage and proceeded towards his car. The poor guy was driving a 1952 Chevrolet that looked like a reject from a demolition derby. On our way there, he kept apologizing for the car saying things like "I know that it looks like a rust bucket but it sure has a good engine". When I inquired why he had so many gallons of water in the back seat, he told me that they were there for when the engine overheated. I nodded while thinking; I thought he said that it had a good engine! I was beginning to understand what life, as an exile would be like. Out the window, everywhere I looked, I would see gravel and lime rock with overgrown bushes. I kept wondering how on earth do they grow anything around here with no topsoil? Where are the tall buildings? Why don't the streets have curbs? Where are those beautiful scenic views of the countryside that I had seen in books? Is this all there is? Noooooo, this better not be all there is to

the USA. Well, I didn't say anything but I was sure thinking it! After traveling for a while on a solitary road leading to the middle of nowhere and just as I was convinced that Serafin was lost, we finally arrived at the Kendall camp.

Within the camp stood this elongated one-story building resembling an army barrack with the entrance on one end. We entered the building and went into an office where some paper work got done. After the formality of the paper work, Serafin left. Someone gave me a tour of the premises and showed me my bunk and locker location. I started unpacking when suddenly I remembered that I had seen a coke machine by the entrance. I hadn't had a coke in years so I threw all my belongings into the locker, closed it and went back to the machine. As I stood there, with anticipation in front of that machine, I reached into my pocket where I always carried my nickel, took it out and as I was going to place it into the slot I realized that the price for my elusive coke was ten cents. I stood there in disbelief holding my buffalo nickel in my hand frozen in time. I kept thinking; this is not happening. It can't be. For heaven's sake it is made here! If anything it should be cheaper! I must have looked pretty pitiful standing in front of that old machine holding my nickel because someone tapped me on the shoulder and said; "coje asere" (here you go buddy) and gave me a dime. After all those years, I was finally having a nice cold coke. Wow what a treat! The day turned into night, and I was felling kind of tired due to the adrenaline rush from the day's events. As I laid there on my bunk looking up at the underside of the bunk above me, analyzing my predicament, I could hear the younger kids crying in the darkness. It was very sad but I knew that I could not give myself that luxury, if I was to survive, so I fought back my feelings and went to sleep.

As the time passed I began to settle in and actually enjoyed my time there. Everyone who worked there went out of their way to help us in any way they could. They would take us to this huge pool located in the Matacumbe camp where we would swim. I learned how to play a game, which seemed really weird at the time, where you got into a fistfight while you held a pointed ball under your arm. I later found out that it was

called football. Then I started to hear rumors that they were planning to send some of the kids up north to orphanages and foster homes. Now, that did not sit well with me, since from my point of view I was already up north. How much further up north are we talking about now? I seem to recall places like Illinois, Nebraska, Montana and Indiana. In addition I previously did not have a problem with the word camp but the words orphanages and foster homes had a negative connotation with me. Now what? Well what I needed was time so on every occasion that I got called in to the office to tell me that they had a “beca” (scholarship) for me, I would tell them that I had just received a letter from my parents telling me that they were going to be arriving any day now. This bought me some time but after a while my credibility was running thin and I felt like Maxwell Smart with his ‘Well, would you believe’ routine so I wrote a letter to my parents to see if they could come up with plan “B”. My parents, who had never failed me, came up with a plan. I moved in with my godparents living in Hialeah.

My stay there was bitter sweet. I had managed to stay in Miami but I was in no way in a place that I could call home. I didn’t even feel comfortable opening the refrigerator door. I learned to ignore the negative, to concentrate on the positive and to continue on the path that my parents had tough me to follow. During my stay there I attended Saint Johns The Apostle Catholic School paid from the money that my parents would send from Cuba.

The 4th of July is USA’s day of independence and it is also mine because on that glorious day in the year 1963 my mother and my sister arrived in Miami from Cuba via Mexico. We moved into this small apartment in the N.W. section of Miami known as Wynwood. One of the first things that I did as I entered the apartment was to open the refrigerator door and stand in front of it smiling. When my mother asked me what was I doing, I said “nothing” then I hugged her. I was finally home. In 1965, two years latter my father arrived penniless after the government confiscated his businesses. I later learned through my father that my mother cried herself to sleep every night during my absence.

Since then I have lived and made Miami my hometown. After St. Johns, I graduated from Robert E. Lee Jr. High, Miami Jackson High School and the University of Miami.

My father, mother and sister have all since passed away and are buried side by side here in Miami. I left them behind when I left Cuba and now they have all departed and left me behind but I know that someday we will be reunited again.

I am now married to another Pedro Panner who is the mother of two wonderful sons and the grandmother of three beautiful grandchildren. We are both registered architects practicing in Miami. I will always be eternally grateful for and to my parents, the USA, the Catholic Church and to all the people that God has sent to help me through this winding road we call life. It is sad to see how our beloved Cuba has become an impoverished third world country with no resemblance to the prosperous society of my black and white memories that I hold so dear. I can't even imagine what my life would have been like in Cuba.

Now when a client wants me to design a temporary structure, I make sure that it can withstand the test of time. What is my definition of temporary? Well so far it is 50 years but I am still counting. One final note, I have been able to hold on to my maracas, I haven't lost my marbles and that buffalo nickel, I still have it!!

**50th Reunion
Albuquerque, New Mexico**



Santa Fe Field Trip



It was a great pleasure for me to attend the 50th Anniversary Reunion in Albuquerque, New Mexico last May 18-20th.

The weekend was a complete success and I want to send my special thanks to Ernesto Perez and his wife Lourdes for all their hard work. Also, to all the other Pedro Pan that pinched in to do whatever was needed so everything went so smooth and the Reunion was such a success. It takes a lot of work and dedication so everybody enjoys a good time but it is worth it. The Pedro Pan bond was definitively felt very strongly by all the Pedro Pan present at this Reunion.

The New Mexico Legislature made a Proclamation on the 50th Anniversary of the first Pedro Pan that arrived in Albuquerque, New Mexico and for their contributions to the state of NM. And the Mayor of Albuquerque declared May 18th, 2012 as Pedro Pan Day to celebrate the arrival of the PP to Albuquerque 50 years ago. Quite an honor for our New Mexican Pedro Pans that is very well deserved.(see attachments). Congratulations to all of them!

An interview with Albuquerque Pedro Pan Tony Lipiz was published in the Albuquerque Journal on May 20th, 2012. (see complete article below). Yalexia Leon, reporter from Univision in Albuquerque, made a two part series titled: "Ninos de un viaje sin retorno", that were transmitted in the local Univision channel on May 30 and 31st. You can see both videos at the following links:

<http://www.kluz.tv/noticia/2012/05/30/375605-ninos-viaje-sin-retorno.html>

<http://www.kluz.tv/noticia/2012/05/31/376075-segunda-parte-ninos-viaje-sin-retorno.html>

We have posted an album in our OPPGI face book account. Even if you don't have a face book account you can still enjoy them at the following link:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.463973216951025.123260.162818820399801&type=1&l=89049e88bd>

On a very personal note, I want to thank the three Albuquerque Pedro Pan that demonstrated me that there are still Cuban gentlemen in this world....On the first night in Albuquerque I lost my wallet and they graciously left the restaurant and

their food to help me find it!!! (and there is a picture to prove it). I was really touched by their help and concern.....Frank Reyes, Tony Henriquez and Tony Lipiz.....Three Albuquerque Gentlemen.....Thanks a lot!!

Cuban Refugees To Reunite in ABQ

By [Charles D. Brunt / Journal Staff Writer](#) on Sun, May 20, 2012
(Published on the Albuquerque Journal)

Just over a half century ago, 14-year-old Antonio “Tony” Lipiz and a throng of Cuban youngsters stepped off a turboprop airliner in Miami and, for the first time in their lives, walked on U.S. soil.

It was October 1961, and the start of Operation Peter Pan — a controversial exodus of more than 14,000 Cuban children sent here by their parents during the uncertain early days of revolutionary Fidel Castro’s rule of the Caribbean island nation.

Like most teenagers, Lipiz had only a rudimentary understanding of the political upheaval taking place in Cuba and viewed his trip to America as an adventure that would last, at most, a few weeks.

Just before boarding the plane in Havana, Tony turned to his father and, in the naivete of youth, told him, “Bye, Papi, I’ll see you on my birthday,” which was only two months away.

It would be nearly 40 years before he saw father again, and it was the last time he would see his mother.

Operation Peter Pan

The origins and purpose of Operation Peter Pan remain unclear, in part because the U.S. government has declined to declassify and release related documents. Cuban dictator Fidel Castro has claimed the CIA sowed fear among the Cuban people that their children, under his rule, would be forcibly taken from them and indoctrinated with his revolutionary ideology.

Others say the program, “Pedro Pan” in Spanish, was created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami at the request of Cuban parents fearful about their children’s future under Castro.

From December 1960 to October 1962, more than 14,000 Cuban children arrived in the United States. About half of them were reunited with relatives or friends in the U.S., and the remainder were cared for by the Catholic Welfare Bureau. Although children as young as age 5 were sent, most were between the ages of 12 and 18.

The children were placed in temporary facilities in Miami — Camp Kendall and Camp Matecumbe — and eventually relocated to 30 states. Aside from Florida, New Mexico took the second highest number of those children, 374, according to Ernesto Pérez-Bermúdez, coordinator for a Pedro Pans reunion taking place this weekend at Hotel Albuquerque.

“The camps had log cabins, a swimming pool, outdoor showers and a dining hall. They were somewhat rustic,” Lipiz, now 65, said Thursday at his West Mesa home.

The camps were temporary homes for children waiting to be sent to live with relatives or placed in foster homes. As children moved to new homes, other Pedro Pans took their place.

“I was 14, and I was getting used to the camps,” Lipiz said. “I got established there and had developed friendships, so I didn’t want to go unless my friends went, too.”

Although he was offered placements in Reno, Chicago, Lincoln, Neb., and New Jersey, he turned them all down, hoping to stay with his buddies. “Then they offered me Albuquerque, and that was my last option,” he said.

On April 25, 1962, Tony Lipiz and 39 other boys flew to Albuquerque.

“We got off the airplane, and there was a horrible sandstorm — typical of Albuquerque in April,” he said. “We could barely see one another.”

Lipiz said the Pedro Pans were welcomed “with open arms” by the city and its residents.

The boys were ultimately moved to a group home on Lagunitas Lane in the South Valley, which became known as “the VCC,” shorthand for the patron saint of Cuba, La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre — also known as Our Lady of Charity.

“Soon after we arrived, 10 of the boys left to new homes,” he said. “They were immediately replaced by a new group, so there was always about 40 boys at the house.”

Lipiz never did get placed with a foster family. Living at the VCC was comfortable, he said, but the constant turnover was trying.

“We would get used to each other and become friends, and then suddenly they were gone and you’d never see them again,” Lipiz said. “This is the case with some of my buddies that I’m going to see at this reunion. Some of them I haven’t seen since 1962.”

In hindsight, Lipiz said those separations — as well as that from his family — made it hard to establish lasting relationships.

For years, his only communication with his family was by way of letters, but the tensions between the United States and Castro made even that risky.

“There was always a fear that our letters were being read (by the Cuban government) and that something written could put my parents in harm’s way,” he said.

He often mailed his parents household items that, because of the economic blockade of Cuba, were nearly impossible to obtain there.

“I remember sending razor blades to my father so he could shave.” He’d also send U.S. dollars, a highly prized commodity in Cuba.

Back to Cuba

Over the years, Lipiz attended the University of New Mexico, moved to California, got married, became a father, moved back to Albuquerque, divorced and remarried — experiences he and his parents weren’t able to share together.

Having worked in a variety of jobs over the years, ranging from aerospace work in California to working for Nabisco in Albuquerque, Lipiz started looking for a career change in 1980.

“I saw an ad in the paper that a new program was opening for runaways and homeless kids. That got me intrigued,” he said. Because of the unique nature of his own upbringing, Lipiz thought he could help troubled kids.

He soon went to work for New Day, a nonprofit that operated group homes and provided counseling and shelter for troubled teenagers. It proved a natural fit, and he

stayed at New Day for 22 years. He left New Day in 2000, worked as a furniture buyer for several years, and retired earlier this year.

Through it all, Lipiz worried about his parents and brother, and how they were faring under Castro. Still, he could not bring himself to visit his homeland.

“I always had a fear, not of repercussions, but of facing something that I loved very much, but that I wanted, in a way, to forget,” he said.

“I never quite understood the situation when I left ... but my parents felt it was for my own good to come here so, being an obedient son, I left.”

The longer he pushed thoughts of returning home to the back of his mind, the easier it became to leave them there.

“It took a long time for me to make the decision to go back,” he said.

But seven months before his planned return to Cuba, his mother, Maria Antonia Moncio, died on Christmas Day 1999, at age 92.

Thirty-eight years after boarding that plane to Miami, Tony Lipiz finally went home.

Seeing his father after nearly four decades was harder than he had imagined.

“I couldn’t stop crying,” Lipiz said when recalling seeing his father sitting in a taxi at the Havana airport. “Even now, it’s hard to talk about.”

Manuel “Papi” Lipiz, a longtime professor of language and mathematics at the University of Havana, loved to paint, and drew the illustrations for a number of novels.

It’s a passion he passed on to his eldest son, an accomplished painter and muralist.

Papi always told Antonio that the family could not leave Cuba because his brother, Alberto, had Down syndrome. Though Tony felt that was more excuse than reason, he accepted long ago that he would always live apart from his family.

Unanswered questions

He saw how run-down most of Cuba has become, from the re-restored ’50s-era Chevrolets that serve as taxis to the now ramshackle home he grew up in.

“I almost needed a four-wheel-drive to get to the house,” Lipiz said.

During that 10 days, he took his father shopping, shared meals with him and saw clearly that his father’s health was failing.

The questions that haunted him over the years would remain unanswered.

“I tried to talk about the separation with my father, but it was too difficult,” Lipiz said as he clenched his jaw to choke back still-buried emotions.

“I tried to talk to him about it, but I sensed that he was going through the same things that I was, and we never got to the topic. I don’t know whether that was good or bad.”

“When I saw the conditions my father was living in, the condition of our house, how the country was. ... At that moment, I appreciated more than ever that he sent me here.”

Manuel Lipiz died on Easter Sunday 2001, eight months after his son visited Cuba.

Antonio’s brother, Alberto, died on New Year’s Day 2002.

This weekend, Lipiz will share his stories with the only people who can really understand the twists, turns and trials in his life — his fellow Pedro Pans.

“I’m really looking forward to seeing my buddies again,” he said, noting that, of the original 40 Pedro Pans who came to Albuquerque, only six are still here. “It’s going to be great.”

Stories about Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh

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"A Lesson in Life" by Rafael

(last name undisclosed upon request)

Describing such an important figure as Monsignor Walsh in a few lines is not an easy task. However, I would like to write about how I met him and the impact that meeting had in my life. This will be my way of honoring him on the tenth anniversary of his death.

The late Elly Vilano Chovel introduced us. She had great admiration for him and always talked about him. I had no idea of what he had done for the Cuban children, his generosity or his work. I had heard a lot about him but at the time Operation Pedro Pan was going on I was still in Cuba and I wasn't able to leave Cuba until 1980.

My first impression of him was that he was a very humble man and very easy to talk to. You couldn't miss his 6'4" stature and his strong Irish accent. All this piqued my interest and I decided to find out more about his apostolate, not only with the Cuban children but with many other persons and projects as well.

After that first introduction, I met him in two or three more occasions. The last time I saw him I was very lucky. It was very early and he still didn't have as many people around him as he always had. I had the opportunity to talk to him for a few minutes in a more intimate way.

He was a very intelligent man with a deep and intense look in his eyes that could see inside you. He gave me a practical lesson in religion then and there. I am usually a very reserved person but I felt that he was a person that I could trust to hear my confession. I told him: "I am not a practicing Catholic but I graduated from the Maristas School in la Vibora, Havana. I

have always kept my faith and my hope alive. Today, while talking to you, I feel that though I was not one of your Pedro Pan kids, I also suffered the separation from my loved ones whom I did not see in so many years that it seemed centuries. I feel that everything that I suffered was not in vain, it was for our children and grandchildren that are here. By living such an exemplary life, you have given me a great lesson about life and about faith.”

He gave me his blessing and we shook hands. That was the last time I saw him. For me, that day was a great lesson in life. That is why Msgr. Walsh will always live in my thoughts and in my life.

Our recently departed Pedro Pan parents

They were the real heroes of Operation Pedro Pan and their unconditional love and unselfish sacrifice deserves to be remembered and honored by all of us Pedro Pan kids. If your parent has passed away recently, please send us the information to include and honor them in our Newsletter.

Pedro Pan Fathers:

1. Guido A. Diaz: Born in Central Tuinicu, Las Villas, Cuba. Deceased on May 3, 2012, he was 85 years old.

His Pedro Pan children, Juanita Diaz Garcia and Luis A. Diaz came on May 5th, 1962 went to a foster home and relocated to Chicago upon Guido's arrival one year and half later. One year later, the family was complete with the arrival of the mother. Guido was buried the same day that marked a milestone in the family life: fifty years after sending his children through Operation Pedro Pan.

Daughter Juanita lovingly describes him as:

"Mi papa era un hombre muy alegre y divertido, buen padre y sobre todo un buen Cubano."

Pedro Pan Mothers:

1. Celia A. Rodriguez: Born in La Habana, Cuba. Deceased on April 14, 2012, she was 86 years old.

Her Pedro Pan daughters, Mayda and Lina came through Operation Pedro Pan on April 7, 1961. After a short stay in Kendall they were sent to an orphanage in Dubuque, Iowa, and continued their journey with family friends in Signal Mt., Tennessee for two more years. Her daughter Mayda remembers her mother: "My mother had a very sad childhood, and yet she was never bitter about this. Mother always wanted the best for her two daughters. Did I mention she was a terrific cook? I miss her so much. I have lost my best friend."

2. Lidia Naranjo: Born in La Habana, Cuba. September 20, 1963-March 29, 2012. She was 88 years old at the time of her passing.

Her Pedro Pan sons, arrived on July 24, 1962. Both Carlos M. and Gil Naranjo went to Albuquerque, NM. Carlos to Villa Virgen del Cobre and Gil to a foster home. Both Lidia and her husband came through the Freedom Flights on December 1965, three years after sending their sons to freedom.

Her son Gil remembers his mother:

"My mother was a very loving and caring person, always putting others first. I appreciate the sacrifice she made by sending us out of Cuba and I am forever grateful for her love and wonderful cooking."

Our Special Pedro Pan teachers:

1. Raul L. Zayas-Bazan Perdomo: Born in Camaguey, Cuba. Deceased on May 6th, 2012, he was 92 years old.

Raul was a lawyer and a teacher at Las Escuelas Pias in Havana. He emigrated in 1962 with his family and started working as a teacher for the Pedro Pan boys at Camp Matecumbe. He will always be remembered by the "matecumberos". Raul's life was an example on serving others throughout all his life. May he rest in peace.

Looking for Pedro Pan

ATTENTION

Ms. Connie Homan-Masarik is looking for 21 Pedro Pan kids. Her parents George and Dorothy Homan were foster parents for 21 Pedro Pan kids and used to live in Minola Drive in Miami Springs and there was a sign written on the front of the house: 441 Homan. Her father spoke Spanish as he worked for PA in Nicaragua for several years. Connie was 6 years old at the time but she will like to reconnect with the Pedro Pan kids that might remember her parents.

If you have any information, please contact us at: members@pedropan.org or 305 554 7196.

Future Events Calendar:

Saturday, June 16, 2012 at 10 AM - Father's Day Breakfast

Place: Las Vegas Restaurant, 11500 NW 41 St., Doral, FI 33178

Saturday, July 21, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast

Place: TBA

Saturday, August 18, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast

Place: TBA

Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast

Place: TBA

Saturday, October 20, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast

Place: TBA

Saturday, November 17, 2012 - Thanksgiving Dinner

Place: Miami Beach Resort and Spa., 4833 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, fl

Sunday, November 18, 2012 at 10:30 AM- Thanksgiving Mass

Place: St. Joseph Catholic Church, 8670 Byron Ave., Miami Beach, FI

Saturday, December 15, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast

Place: TBA

Sunday, December 20, 2012 - Memorial Mass

Place: TBA

Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc

A National Charitable Organization of the former Children of Pedro Pan

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