

Dear friends,

This month we have one of our favorite activities, the Annual OPPG Picnic....On Sunday, March 18, 2012 we will be gathering for our Annual family Picnic on Kendall Indian Hammock Park (Shelter # 1) See attachment for more information. Bring your children and grandchildren for a day of fun and camaraderie....Don't forget to bring your OPPG blue T-shirts for the group picture!! (And yes, we will have them on sale at the Picnic, just in case you still don't have one...!!).

As many of us are celebrating our own 50th anniversaries throughout 2011 and 2012, I thought you would like to read how some Pedro Pan celebrate such an important milestone in our lives. The first article is from the "Muchachitas de Villa Maria" Reunion (what a way to go...these girls had a whole weekend of celebrations in Miami!!). The other one is the story of a family in Rome, NY that I found worth sharing with all.

Even if you don't celebrate in a big way....you can always celebrate that special day reuniting with your special ones....in spirit if it can't be in person.....or make a donation to someone that needs help at this moment.....and feels as lonely and scared as you did 50 years ago. Food for thought for my Pedro Pan brothers/sisters.

This month I am including two stories about Monsignor Walsh. Reflections about him and his personality that you have sent us. We were blessed by having him in our lives and what a better way to remember him than reading all these stories about him.....(if you feel compelled to write something after reading these stories, please send them to us). The stories will be published by OPPG to honor the memory of Monsignor Bryan O. Walsh at a later date.

Love,

Carmencita Romanach

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

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

[www.pedropan.org](http://www.pedropan.org)

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***March 3, 2012***

***Pedro Pan News***



**Las muchachitas de Villa María**

**Por Marilyn Sánchez de Borroto**

## Diario Las Americas

Publicado el 02-14-2012

Todos los exilados tienen una historia que contar. Esta es la nuestra. Una historia que comienza en el verano de 1962 cuando llegamos a San Antonio, Texas a vivir en el cuarto piso de Villa María, un albergue de señoritas regido por monjas, Las Hijas de María Inmaculada. 40 muchachitas con edades fluctuantes entre 12 y 18 años; este último cumpleaños siendo el número clave, el más temible, el que te sacaba a la calle aunque no tuvieras a donde ir.

Todas veníamos de hogares de clase media alta donde vivíamos dentro de urnas de cristal. Nada nos faltaba. Padres, hermanos, abuelos, tíos, primos, amigos y profesores nos engreían con adoración y excesos materiales. ¿Cómo íbamos a comprender que éramos pobres de solemnidad, recogidas por almas nobles que nos cuidaban, alimentaban y educaban para que pudiéramos afrontar la eventualidad de un futuro incierto?

Nos sentíamos solas, asustadas y confusas; pero sin cuestionar la decisión de nuestros padres de sacarnos de Cuba donde ya no podíamos ir al colegio ni expresarnos con libertad por miedo a que nos lavaran el cerebro de comunismo. Además, regresaríamos después de unos meses; nuestros padres vendrían a buscarnos para no volver a hacer solas la travesía. ¿No se acuerdan?

Éramos unos pocos los que desembarcamos el 4 de abril de 1962. La azafata había anunciado: “Bienvenidos a La Libertad. La noche ha quedado atrás.” Algunos aplaudieron, muchos lloraron ... y los niños que viajaban solos en aquel avión buscaban respuestas y nadie les hacía caso.

Habíamos llegado a Miami con abrigos nuevos y un secreto que no podíamos contar: busquen a George. Un hombre extremadamente alto y delgado llamado George nos ofrecía helado y chicle, desaparecidos de Cuba desde el principio de la revolución, antes de montarnos en su guaguüita azul. Nos mirábamos aún sin comprender dónde estábamos y a dónde íbamos. Kendall, Carrión, Matecumbe ... iban alojando a los varones para después llevar las niñas a Florida City, un campamento con casitas pequeñas donde cabíamos 20 niñas, 6 en cada cuarto con 3 literas, y nuestros “foster parents”, un término que no habíamos oído nunca

antes de llegar al campamento.

Nos alineaban en la oficina y los foster parents escogían a quien se llevaban a su casa. Algunos mejor que otros nos introducían al resto de la prole y comenzaban los cuentos de horror: nos van a dar beca para quién sabe dónde y nos mandarán aún más lejos de nuestra casa. Algunas iban a buenos colegios y otras a orfanatos. ¿Le dirán a mi mamá a dónde fui?

40 niñas fueron enviadas a Villa María y otras vendrían después a ocupar alguna de las 40 camas que se iban quedando vacías a medida que nos íbamos reuniendo con nuestros padres o cumpliendo “la mayoría de edad”.

Inevitablemente, nuestra juventud fue el bálsamo milagroso que enjugó nuestras lágrimas y nos ayudó a sonreír. Formamos un núcleo de hermanas: discutíamos entre nosotras pero nos uníamos contra el resto de la humanidad. Nos comprendíamos y aconsejábamos; nos prestábamos la ropa; nos maquillábamos y hasta bailamos el nostálgico vals de “los quince” unas con otras para que no pasara desapercibida tal celebridad. Pero cuando nos demostrábamos un amor sin fronteras era al aceptar servirnos de chaperona saliendo en “blind double dates” porque las monjas no nos dejaban salir solas con los muchachos. ¡Cuántos embarques tuvimos que soportar para que la otra pasara un rato agradable!

Las más jóvenes asistimos a colegios privados muy buenos y a las mayores les ofrecían cursos tecnológicos que nos pudieran ayudar a enfrentar el futuro inminente. Salir de Cuba se hacía cada vez más difícil, así que algunas nos reunimos con nuestros padres a los pocos meses de nuestra separación y otras nos tardamos un poco más; inclusive otras nunca lograron ese anhelo. Sin embargo, todas aprendimos a enfrentar la vida con positivismo y valentía.

En el 1987, 25 años después de haber enraizado una obligada y necesaria unión aquel verano del '62, convocamos a una reunión en Miami y vinimos desde California, Georgia, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Puerto Rico, Perú, Venezuela, Italia y, por supuesto, Florida. Vivíamos en lugares distantes, teníamos carreras distintas, la mayoría había cambiado su apellido y criábamos a nuestros hijos; pero todas recordábamos el pacto que habíamos hecho cuando más nos necesitábamos y confirmamos el amor que siempre hemos sentido unas por otras.

El sueño americano tuvo un final feliz para nosotras. Libres para escoger nuestro potencial como adultas nos hicimos abogadas, jueza, activistas, amas de casa, artistas, banqueras, contadoras, dependientas, doctoras, enfermeras, profesoras, secretarias, traductoras, vendedoras de bienes raíces ... una escogió ser diplomática, fungiendo varios oficios en Foreign Affairs, a quien condecoraron con la medalla Secretary of State Life Achievement Award. Hoy retirada se ha convertido en un shaman sanador de energías y transformadora del tarot. Un salto solamente probable en América, donde se puede escoger vivir a su manera.

Volveremos a reunirnos en Miami para celebrar nuestro 50 aniversario del 17 al 20 de febrero, 2012. Algunas de las actividades que hemos organizado incluyen una visita a Florida City y Washington Park, donde jugábamos pelota juntas. Abrazarnos bien fuerte recordando a las que ya han fallecido. Pasarnos la última noche de nuestra reunión en un colegio donde restableceremos a Villa María, incluyendo a la Madre Javier, la Madre San Luis y la Hermana Domitila. Y nos despediremos sabiendo que la unión que marcó nuestras vidas hace 50 años y el amor que siempre nos hemos profesado vivirá por siempre en nuestros corazones.

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## **A Pedro Pan family celebrates their 50th anniversary**

Article by **Jen DeVincenzo** published in **Rome Sentinel- February 8, 2012-**



**CHILLY RECEPTION:** When they first arrived in Rome, many of the Cuban refugees reacted badly to the extreme shift in climates from Cuba and Miami to Upsate NY in February. From left, Angie, 13, Rolando, 9, Tete, 11, and Nina Ramirez, 12, huddle together outside.

Fifty years ago today, eight children from Communist Cuba found sanctuary with four foster families in Rome.

From December 1960 to October 1962, more than 14,000 Cuban children arrived, alone, in the United States. What is now known as "Operation Pedro Pan" was the largest recorded exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western Hemisphere. The time period was framed by the CIA's abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Fidel Castro's Cuba and the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Approximately, half of the minors were reunited with relatives or friends at the airport. The rest were cared for by the Catholic Welfare Bureau, directed by a then 30-year-old Irish priest, Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh. The youths from the Cuban Refugee Children's Program were placed in temporary shelters in Miami, and relocated in 30 states.

The four Ramirez children were among the eight placed with local foster homes. According to a Sentinel article published on March 3, 1962, the Syracuse Diocese found homes for 20 children.

Angelica "Angie" Sabates, Fort Valley, Va.; Maria Cristina "Nina" Ramirez, Miami, Fla.; and Maria Teresa "Tete" Sharrow, Goldsboro, N.C., remember their time with Mr. and Mrs. Carleton Johnson, then on Rome-Lowell Road, with fondness and deep gratitude. Their brother, Rolando Jr., passed away in July 2005. When they arrived in Miami, they were 13, 12, 11 and 9 years of age, respectively.

"Shortly after our arrival there from Cuba, Msgr. Francis J. Willenburg, representing the Catholic Charities of the Rome/Utica area in New York State, traveled to Florida to select some of the Cuban children to be placed with foster families," the Ramirez sisters said in a letter. "We will be forever grateful and indebted to Msgr. Willenburg for his instrumentality in selecting us and assuring that we were not separated as siblings. Most especially our deepest, heartfelt appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. Carleton (Brud) Johnson for so selflessly embracing God's call to open their home and family life to us.

"Brud (deceased) and Jean had two children of their own, Jackie and Jerry (deceased), who also instantly treated us as their own siblings. They, and all the members of their extended family, sincerely considered us part of their own, for only thus could we have been blessed to feel as such immediately. This was possible in spite of our inability to speak any English whatsoever, nor they any Spanish."

The community also welcomed and supported the children, who attended St. Mary's school and later were among the first to attend Rome Catholic High School.

"Ten months after our departure from Cuba, deeply aware of the reality that we might never see our family again, as the Communist regime there had intensified its restrictions, we were miraculously blessed with the arrival of our parents in October of that same year, 1962," the sisters said. "Though many Cuban children would leave their foster families and towns to reunite with their parents in Miami upon their arrival, our parents, Rolando 'Pucho' (deceased) and Amalia 'Nenetta' Ramirez, in gratitude for all the love and care that had been extended to us, chose to move to Rome and reunite there, in order to become part of the community.

"Once again, the sincere manifestation of selfless love and generosity was extended to them by the Johnson family, with whom we all remained until we were able to live on our own, as well as by the entire community. As our parents did not speak any English, and had to leave Cuba with nothing, monetary or material goods, we had to await the opportunity for them to work in order to become independent and support our family of six," the sisters said. "This was soon made possible by all who trusted in our parents' good will and moral values, and therefore provided them with the opportunity to begin anew as a family."

Their parents became very involved in the community. Rolando Ramirez was a member of the Knights of Columbus in St. Mary's parish, and of the Lions Club. He worked at Rome Cable, Kmart, and Montgomery Ward, before eventually opening his own carpet and decorating store, Ramirez Decoration Center on West Dominick Street across from the Capitol Theatre. The store, re-named Ramirez Carpetland, later moved to Erie Boulevard. Rolando was also a Spanish teacher in Rome Catholic High School. Their mother Amalia was involved in the school and parish with the mother's guild. She first found work babysitting and later became assistant manager of the S&H Green Stamps store. Amalia worked with their father in his carpet business, which they founded together. She now resides in Florida with her daughter Nina.

"They were very dedicated parents, who would always partake with us in all the activities in the parish and school, where our family life revolved," they said.

In 1963 their paternal grandparents also joined them in Rome for awhile, before moving with their uncle to Miami.

"Above all, we give thanks to Almighty God for His Infinite Mercy upon our family. He inspired and guided our parents to exercise this great act of love, to selflessly separate from us, so that we could continue to embrace and live our Catholic Faith with freedom; something that Communism had suddenly denied us. As they were not allowed to leave Cuba then, had they kept us with them, we would have risked the slavery of that atheistic regime for all posterity." The sisters also expressed their gratitude to the Johnson's and Msgr. Willenburg, as well as the priests, teachers, friends who helped them keep their faith.

"Having become parents and grandparents ourselves, we are evermore aware and appreciative of the immense sacrifice involved on the part of all who gave so much of themselves, in order to fill the most profound void within our very tender hearts." Between them they have six children and 37 grandchildren, seven of which have passed away.

"Though eventually, many years later, we all moved on to other areas in the country, Rome and its people always held a very special place in our hearts, filled with fond and joyful memories of dear friends and events in our young lives, never to be forgotten," the sisters said. "In 1962, the good people of Rome, New York, and its vicinity, were integrated into our family history; most certainly one that our children, grandchildren, and future generations will always know, as they remember our journey as Cuban exiles to American citizens."

-- Associated Press Wire

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## Stories about Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh

# 2

“THERE”

by Jorge Armando Pardo

The word that most connotes Monsignor Bryan Walsh to me is “there”. He was there when I arrived from Cuba, a frightened boy of 15, to give me a home in which to live. He was there (with paddle in hand) when I needed discipline, and there with an open heart to give advice when I needed that. He was there, too, to get me out of trouble when I messed up.

And his being there didn’t end when I left St Rafael’s. Over the years he has been there to celebrate with our family on special occasions – our 25th wedding anniversary, my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, our children’s graduations and weddings and grandchildren’s christenings. And he was there whenever we just needed to talk. Despite his incredibly busy schedule, he would always make time to be there.

Now that he is no longer here, he is still there for me when I say my prayers each morning because I believe that he is a saint who can intercede for us in heaven.

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## Stories about Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh

# 3

by Jose Fojo

At a dinner table conversation during a Pedro Pan meeting at Barry University just weeks before Msgr. Walsh’ death,

I told Monsignor that if it hadn’t been for him, my wife, Blanca, would have never left Cuba and we would have never met... to which he quickly quipped:

***“Don’t blame me!”***

Such was his personality and good humor. I thank God for having had the chance to know him.

PS: My wife and I recently celebrated, in June, our 42nd wedding anniversary. Thank you Rev. Walsh.

OPERATION  
PEDRO PAN GROUP, INC.



# Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc. Annual Family Picnic Celebrating with our families!



Sunday, March 18th, 2012  
11:30 am - 4:30 pm

**Come & have some fun!**

Kendall Indian Hammocks Park  
Shelter # 1  
2012  
\$ 15 per person  
11395 SW 79 St.  
2012  
Miami, Florida  
are free

Donation: \$ 10 per person  
before March 11,  
Donation:  
after March 12,  
children under 12

We will take our Annual Group Picture. Take your OPPG Shirt if you have one

**OPPG Polo Shirts will be on Sale at the Picnic**

.....  
.....  
<<Please cut-out this section & mail with your check by March 11, 2012>>

NAME(s) \_\_\_\_\_ #  
Children \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to:**

**Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc. & mail them to :  
c/o Frank Echeverria**

**9710 SW 6 St., Miami, Fl. 33174**

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**Atlanta Pedro Pan**

Next Reunion will be held on Sunday,  
March 11, 2012

at:

Mojito's Cuban American Bistro

35 S. Peachtree St.

Norcross, Ga 30071

Lunch at 1 p.m.

Please RSVP to:

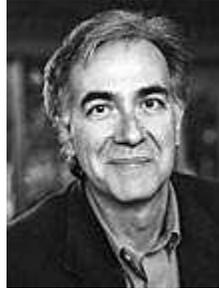
Emy Botet at [ebotet@yahoo.com](mailto:ebotet@yahoo.com) 404 775 0440

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**ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL HISTORY CENTER**

**65 E. Central Blvd., Orlando, Fl 32801**

presents:



**Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy"**

with Carlos M. N. Eire, Ph.D.

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

With Special Guest U.S. Senator Mel Martinez

6:30 p.m. Reception

7:15 p.m. Dinner, followed by program and book signing.

\$40 Members; \$50 non-members. Table pricing available.

Call (407) 836-7010 for reservations.

Limited seating. Reserve early  
to guarantee your spot.

Please reserve directly with Orange County Regional History Center at the information provided above.

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**Looking for Pedro Pan**

ATTENTION:

1- We received a note from Eduardo Palmer, he is looking for his cousins Jorge y Francisco Rivera Mendieta. Both came in late 1961 or beginning of 1962 and were living in New York. If you have any information about them, please contact us at:

[members@pedropan.org](mailto:members@pedropan.org) or 305 554 7196

## **Future Events Calendar:**

### **Sunday, March 18, 2012 at 11:30 AM- 4:00 PM- Picnic**

Place: Kendall Indian Hammocks Park, 11395 SW 79th St., Miami, FI (Shelter # 1)

### **Saturday, April 21, 2012 at 10 AM - Election Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Friday, May 11, 2012 at 8 PM- Swearing In**

Place: Doral Reception Hall, 10395 NW 41St., Doral, FI (second floor)

### **Saturday, June 16, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Saturday, July 21, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Saturday, August 18, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Saturday, September 15, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Saturday, October 20, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

### **Saturday, November 2012 - Thanksgiving Dinner**

Place: TBA

### **Saturday, December 15, 2012 at 10 AM - Breakfast**

Place: La Casona Restaurant, 9608 SW 72nd St., Miami, FI

## **Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc**

**A National Charitable Organization of the former Children of Pedro Pan**

161 Madeira Avenue, Suite 61 Coral Gables, FL. 33134 - (305) 554-7196

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