

Dear friends,

In less than two weeks we will be celebrating the Closure of the 50th Anniversary of our Exodus. We have planned a very special weekend of celebrations for all of you. Fifty years ago we became brothers and sisters, and this year 2012 we celebrate together as a family again. We have been blessed with the gift of freedom and the unconditional love of our parents. The legacy we leave our children and grandchildren is a priceless one. Let us give thanks to the Lord and celebrate!!

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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November 3, 2012

Pedro Pan News

Florida City Pedro Pan Camp was Home to Hundreds

As published in South Dade News

By [Julie Schaffter](#) Sat, Nov 03, 2012



A group of girls who lived at the Operation Pedro Pan camp in Florida City stand in front of the building they called “El Barco” (the ship). The photo was taken in 1962.

Most parents would do anything to ensure the safety of their children — no sacrifice too great, no price too steep. In December of 1960, Cuban parents made just such a sacrifice, sending thousands of children across the Florida Straits to Miami, all to save them from the Marxist-Leninist indoctrination sweeping Cuban schools and government at the time.

This mass immigration was known as Operation Pedro Pan (or Operation Peter Pan), and has had a lasting effect on the shaping of South Florida and especially

Florida City, where one of the camps was located.

Operation Pedro Pan was a program created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau in December 1960. Parents sent their children to the United States, trusting they would be cared for while conflict in Cuba was sorted out.

Many parents were tried for crimes, jailed, and some were executed.

The program ended October 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis, but camps remained open for several years.

There were numerous camps in Florida for the children to reside in, but the Florida City camp, which used to be located on NW 2nd Ave., between NW 14th and 16th Streets, has received special recognition. This month it will become the home to a historical marker identifying the significance of the area and explaining some of its history.

Carmen Valdivia, a member of the Operation Pedro Pan Group and a Pedro Pan child herself, is one of those responsible for applying for the historical marker. Arriving in America with nothing more than the clothes on her back, deprived of her suitcase full of belongings, her parents, and with only her sister for comfort, Carmen feels as though it is important for everyone to understand the importance of the Pedro Pan camps.

“It was supposed to be temporary,” she explained, when asked about the operation. “We thought that the United States would never allow Communism within ninety miles of their shores, so it was just for us to be safe while our parents could try to get out of trouble in Cuba.” Her father was jailed by the Cuban government. Carmen and her sister spent three years in the Florida City camp, from 1962-1965.

“The Florida City camp was for girls - older girls - and the young boys, under twelve” she recalled. “Then after October 1962 there were no more children coming, so the camps were not as overcrowded and the problem of relocation was not as imminent.”

When the operation first got underway, around 200 children were expected. Miami ended up receiving 14,000 children within twenty-two months, the largest exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western hemisphere.

Carmen remembered the dormitories, which housed about ten children on each side, and the ‘house parents’ who resided in the middle and did their best to make the children comfortable. She fondly remembered the basketball and baseball teams for boys, and the volleyball team she played on. The teams would compete against the local Catholic schools. Birthdays were celebrated with cake and dancing, and children were kept occupied during the day.

“At night was when your mind would go to Cuba,” she said. “That was when we’d start crying.” Like many children, Carmen and her sister were eventually reunited with their parents, but the camp at Florida City would forever remain a part of their lives. In 2009, all of the children who lived through Pedro Pan camps would be given a reminder of their past in the form of a database, containing all the names of those who passed through Miami and filtered into the camps.

“Little by little we started finding all the friends we had lost for years,” Carmen said. “It was very exciting. Everybody started wanting to go to the camp and asked how do we get there. We decided there really should be something marking the place, so people could find it.”

On November 16th a ceremony for the dedication of the historical marker will begin at 10:30 am. Afterwards, will be the unveiling of the street renamed Pedro Pan Place (formerly NW 2nd Ave). It was here where Carmen, her sister, and hundreds of other children “grew up overnight”, and where many called home for several years.

“We hope that it will be an example,” Carmen expressed, “that no matter how low your condition in life is that you can always succeed I think that experience of all of the sudden finding yourself with only your education, it gave us such a sense of the importance of education and work, that anything can be achieved, and that’s what I want people to get from that. That nothing is impossible.”

Editor’s Note: Those wishing to find others in the Operation Pedro Pan database can visit www.pedropan.org.

<http://southdadenewsleader.com/issue/south-dade-news-leader/article/florida-city-pedro-pan-camp-was-home-to-hundreds>

What is an Historical Marker?

Many of you have asked us that question, here is an excerpt taken from the Florida Department of State website, Division of Historical Resources that answers that question (see below).

The Dedication Ceremony of the Florida Heritage Landmark Marker on

November 16th, 2012 at the former Florida City Camp is in itself an historical event sponsored by OPPG and OPPG's Historic Committee as a fulfillment of our Mission Statement. This historical marker, the first bilingual one (English-Spanish) in the State of Florida, is the first one of a series to be continued in the rest of the camps that sheltered us over 50 years ago.

We dedicate this historical marker to all in the Pedro Pan community.

Excerpt from Dpt. of Historical Resources, Florida Department of State website:

Criteria for Florida Historical Markers

The Florida Historical Marker Program recognizes historic resources, persons and events that are significant in the areas of architecture, archaeology, Florida history and traditional culture by promoting the placing of historic markers and plaques at sites of historical and visual interest to visitors. The purpose of the program is to increase public awareness of the rich cultural heritage of the state and to enhance the enjoyment of historic sites in Florida by its citizens and tourists.

To be recognized as either a Florida Heritage Site or Florida Heritage Landmark a resource must meet the following criteria:

Florida Heritage Site

- To qualify as a Florida Heritage Site a building, structure or site must be at least 30 years old and have significance in the areas of architecture, archaeology, Florida history or traditional culture, or be associated with a significant event that took place at least 30 years ago.
- Resources associated with a historically significant person may qualify as a Florida Heritage Site 30 years after the death of the individual or 30 years after the event with which the person is associated.
- The resource should visibly retain those physical characteristics that were present during the period for which it or the associated person is significant.
- A moved building or structure may qualify as a Florida Heritage Site if the move was made 30 or more years ago, or the move was made to preserve the resource from demolition and reasonable attempts were made to ensure that the new setting is similar to the historical setting.

Florida Heritage Landmark

- To qualify as a Florida Heritage Landmark a building, structure or site must be at least 50 years old and have regional or statewide significance in the areas of architecture, archaeology, Florida history or traditional culture, or be associated with an event of statewide or national significance that took place at least 50 years ago.
- Resources associated with persons of regional or statewide historical significance may be recognized with Florida Heritage Landmark status 50 after the death of the individual or 50 years after the historical event with which the person is associated.
- In certain cases, resources that are less than 50 years old but are significant at the statewide or national level also may qualify as a Florida Heritage Landmark.



- The resource should visibly retain those physical characteristics that were present during the period for which it or the associated person is significant. A moved building or structure may still qualify as a Florida Heritage Landmark if the move was made 50 or more years ago, or the move was made to preserve the resource from demolition and reasonable attempts were made to ensure that the new setting is similar to the historical setting.

ELY VILANO CHOVEL ROAD

***Our Pedro Pan sister and one of the founders of our group, Operation Pedro Pan Group, Inc.,
has been honored by the naming of SE 15th Road at Brickell Bay as***

Elly Chovel Road

***Her generous heart and beautiful smile will be remembered by all who met her.
Congratulations to the Vilano Chovel family on such a happy occasion***

Stories about Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh

12

Uncle Bryan: A life of Flying High-Giving centered around Family by Dermot O'Brien

Hello Everyone, it is a true honor and pleasure to be here with you today. Our family thank you for your invitation and my sister Roisin, and I are delighted to be here in person. On behalf of all our relations: the Walshs, O'Briens, Holihans, and Harringtons, from Australia, South Africa, Scotland, Ireland and the U.S., we thank you for keeping Uncle Bryan's memory alive and in your hearts. We are all very proud of his achievements and very appreciative for all the honors and awards the people of Operation Pedro Pan have bestowed on him.

We all know how much Monsignor Bryan loved to fly his plane, even from a very young age. In many ways flying is a good metaphor for the "higher purpose" by which he lived his life. He always operated at an altitude far greater than is reasonable to expect from a good and caring person. Many of us can only hope to leave this world a little better than we found it but how rare it is to experience a life that has had such profound impact on so many as Uncle Bryan's life has had.

Msgr. Bryan was very much a man of Giving, who centered his life around Family. Whether it was his religious family, his Pedro Pan family, his community family, or his blood relations, he always found ways to connect, give, and have a lasting impact on so many of us. As was his way with so many of my relatives, uncle Bryan made the time and traveled to marry my wife and I and christened both of our children, Samantha and DJ. He traveled to New York for his final surgery and once again reached out and took the time to visit and stay with us. We never thought that this would be the last time we would see him-he even called me on the phone just a short time before going into surgery.

Growing up we had heard of some of the good things he had done but it was really at his funeral when I experienced the outpouring of love from the Miami and Pedro Pan community that I realized, more fully, the kind of impact he had on so many. This is because he was a very humble person. I don't recall him ever talking about the things he had done to help others.

Now, don't get me wrong, he was also a very confident person who had strong opinions! As children we would be on our best behavior around him given his booming, deep, and very much mixed American and Irish accent! My mother used to tell us about the many Masses he attended growing up and how he would sing hymns at the top of his lungs- he had many talents, but singing was not one of them! The beautiful thing about this story was that he knew he didn't have a pleasant voice to the ear but believed hymns were prayers and that you should give your all when praising or talking to God.

Uncle Bryan, Monsignor Bryan, was a great role model for all of us and left us many examples of how we can all give more of ourselves and our time to others.

Thank you for listening, Roisin and I are very much looking forward to spending the weekend with you, hearing about your amazing 50 year journey, and getting to know many of you. Thank you.

Future Events Calendar:

Friday, November 16, 2012 at 10:30 AM - Florida Heritage Landmark Marker Dedication/

Pedro Pan Place Ceremony/Block Party

Place: Former Florida City Camp, 155 NW 14th St., Florida City, FL 33034

Friday, November 16, 2012 at 7:00 PM - Camp Nostalgia Celebration

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

Saturday, November 17, 2012 at 6:30 PM- Annual Thanksgiving Gala

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, FL

Saturday, December 15, 2012 at 10 AM - Christmas Breakfast

Place: Las Vegas Cuban Cuisine, 11500 NW 41st. St., Doral, FL

Thursday, December 20, 2012 at 8 PM- Memorial Mass

Place: St. Dominic Catholic Church, 5909 NW 7th St., Miami, FL

Tuesday, January 8, 2013 at 10 AM- Toy Distribution

Place: Centro Hispano Catolico Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh, 125 NW 25 St., Miami, FL 33127

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

members@pedropan.org

www.pedropan.org

<http://www.facebook.com/OPPGI>