

[Our mother Carmen meticulously documented the family's first year and a half in exile (1960-61), in Miami, in a scrapbook that she kept, with photos, providing by far the most detailed record of our family's lived experience in our first months in the United States and the tumultuous history that engulfed us. Her journal entries were written in six-month intervals, in Spanish. Carlos and Sasha ([The Banana Boat Story](#)) translated her words, verbatim, below.]

Our First Year in Exile

Carmen Riera Rumbaut

Miami - January 16, 1961

Today is the six-month anniversary of our stay in this city of Miami, where we came, Rubén and I, with our five children on the sixteenth of July last year, fleeing the barbarity of the Communist regime that Fidel Castro had wanted to install in our fatherland. This has been one of the most transcendental and one of the most emotional stages of our married life, highlighted with dramatic and original incidents, so that I can't keep from jotting down my impressions in a scrapbook, the same as we have done with the other periods of our marriage.

Even though the album was bought almost immediately after reaching the North American lands, it hasn't been possible for me to start it until today, in which we mark our first half-year of exile. Even though the interest to carry this out was great, this exile distinguishes itself principally in the total lack of free time, so that at last I started today, making a real sacrifice to take time out in which to write.

After the six months of living away from Cuba, the horrible occurrences that have been happening there each time give us the certainty that we were right in leaving in time, at the same time that we hold onto the hope that this year which we have started will be the year of the liberation and the return. In God we trust that that will be!

With the fall of the dictator, Fulgencio Batista, the first of January 1959, all Cubans were filled with an optimism, foreseeing for Cuba happy days in the hands of the leader of the revolution, Fidel Castro, who would unite all the sectors that had brought down the tyrant and would quickly take our country into a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous climate. As the months passed, however, our limited enthusiasm of the beginning turned into distrust. Rubén started to suspect in May of 1959, with the proposal, or rather, the implementation of the famous "Law of Agrarian Reform," in which one could see clearly Communist intentions.

I was more naive and I kept my faith until the twenty-sixth of October the same year, in which on account of the mysterious disappearance of Camilo Cienfuegos and the arrest of Commander Hubert Matos, Fidel had the public phonetically shouting in front of the palace "Paredón" [implying "take him to the wall and shoot him"] for persons who publicly were known to be innocent. We still awaited the year 1960 with a bit of hope, which we wanted to conserve in that in time there would be a turnaround; but the first months of the year convinced us that the pact with Russia had been made and that there remained only two paths for us: to stay and await what may happen or to flee Cuba before the iron curtain fell.

The career and specialty of Rubén would make it very difficult for him to work in the underground; on the other hand, his contacts with certain sectors of Latin America could perhaps make him useful for another country, where he could speak and write without censorship. That and the moral asphyxiation which one was already experiencing in Cuba and the fear for the security of the children, made us decide to begin to get our passports and visas for the whole family in the month of April 1960.

The passports we were able to secure easily. The permits from DIER to leave the country we were also able to get, through the Fernández Insurance Agency, which also acquired the passports for us. In June, we had everything ready, but we were missing the visa from the American Embassy. The lines waiting for visas were interminable, and they were only granting those with special motives. We requested ours, and they gave us an interview to speak with the Consulate the following 10th of January 1961. We started to pull strings to obtain an earlier interview without talking of our plans with anybody, not even with Rubén's own family, who found out our plans on the eve of the trip.

Ernesto Bascuas, who had helped us marvelously when we tried to get asylum in the Embassy for Elio Alvarez, made certain contacts which turned out ineffective. Gastón Núñez, the husband of China Benítez, got us an interview with an important official of the American Embassy, to whom we explained that because of our relationship and participation in the asylum of Elio Alvarez; my surname Riera, same as my sister, who spoke daily over shortwave radio on an "hour against the Castro government" from the United States; the connections that Rubén had with various leaders of the current Communist regime, who knew the way he thought from back in the time of the MNR of García Bárcenas; our history and active participation in the Catholic Action; the medical career of Rubén, of which the graduates were already being rumored (and in the following months actually occurred) not to be permitted to leave the country, etc. we urgently needed the visa.

We also brought out into the light my employment with Procter & Gamble, and with Esso (Exxon), Rubén's post as a reporter for the "N.C.," and 1000 more things until at last they gave us some hope and offered to call us to tell us the day and time in which we could come to the Embassy. Almost in parallel with this interview, we made another one, through Marta Alvarez, with a friend of hers, Hugo Espinosa, who for his part, was a close friend of an *attaché* of the U.S. and also offered his help. We never knew to which of these two gestures we owed the visa, or if it was the union of both gestures, but Espinosa called us one night to give us an appointment for Tuesday the 12th of July at the Embassy.

All day we spent there with five kids, but by the afternoon, we had the visa in our possession. Immediately we reserved a flight through Cubana de Aviación for Monday the 18th, although two days later, we heard that they were going to hasten up the prohibition of the doctors to leave the country, and to no longer allow taking out \$150, which was the maximum permitted to take out for each adult person; we decided to hasten our own plans and we got reservations through Jorge Diez, an employee of Pan-American, for the seven of us on Flight 422 at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, the sixteenth of July, the day of my feast day.

Right away started the vertigo of procuring traveler's checks. You could only get them in the main office of each bank, so we went to the Trust of Aguilar and Obrapia, where we made known our kinship with Ricardo Rumbaut, Administrator of the Trust of Cienfuegos.

We obtained not only the \$150 for each of us, too, but also \$150 for Rubén Gustavo, who would pass as an adult at twelve years, although he still had a few months to go. With these \$450 in total, \$50 of which we had sent to Miami with Elio Alvarez, \$100 of which had been taken to New York by Angel Powers, in his recent trip to Cuba, \$100 of which Rubén withdrew on the same day of departure, presenting his Certificate of Nationality, and \$25 of which a patient would pay Rubén in Miami, we started our adventure with the five kids.

We had left everything arranged so that Carucha and her husband, Tony, newlyweds, would move into our house at 4306 66th Street, so that they could keep our furniture and stuff, and at the same time maintain our house for our return. Only certain select people found out about the trip. Two or three days before, Rubén's family. On the way to Rancho Boyeros, he left his brief resignation at the Hospital of Mazorra in the house of Dr. Plutzky in Fontanar. He had previously asked for a one-month vacation. To say good-bye to us at the airport, there came Bienvenido and Zoila; Carucha and Tony; Tavito and Charo; Chichí and Marita; Diego, Estelvina, and Vitalia, who found out about it at the last hour; Vicente Rumbaut, who had called us that same day and we had asked him to come by the house (when he got there later, he understood what was happening and left directly for Rancho Boyeros); Guido López and Paquita, whom Rubén told when he went by their house on the way to the airport to take a letter to Dr. Plutzky; Hector René and his sisters; our friends who had helped us, Ernesto Bascuas and Chea, Gastón Núñez and China, Alberto Gutiérrez and María (these three couples would follow us almost immediately into exile); Father Arroyo, and I think nobody else.

Before leaving we could not tell Ramón Casas and Rosita, who found out when they arrived at our house and were informed by Zoila. At the house, there also came to say good-bye to us Marta Alvarez, Zoilita Macías, and Dr. and Mrs. Gurri. Not even the neighbors suspected it, since we put the luggage in the car inside the garage; the cook was sick in her home and knew nothing; the maid, Orgelia, found out the same day. And that's counting that we had fifteen packages to prepare, that the china and the kitchen implements were boxed up, the bicycles and objects of value or interest were taken to the house of Tavito and of Cuchú; the armoires were left in order or empty, according to whether they were going to be stored or disassembled. We had lived days with a terrible agitation; buying clothes, giving away, making lists, boxing up stuff. And the boys were models of discretion, for since April in which they found out when we went to get the passports, they hadn't told anybody of our possible trip, not even their classmates, the maids, or at the house of their grandparents.

On the eve of the trip, we sold Teresita, our dear automobile, for \$1000. That helped to deal with all of the expenses of the trip, to pay for pending debts, and to leave a little extra for the move of Carucha, some monthly payments during the next few months, and a sum so they could try to send it to us by means of the Certificate of Nationality, although this last route was suspended almost immediately after our trip, and we never got to receive that sum, which we were so counting on.

At 5:00 p.m. we were at the airport, but it was almost 7:00 p.m. before we boarded the plane, and we stayed there without taking off around another half hour, due to what we didn't know. The impatience was terrible. Together with us going into exile in the same plane were Humberto Estévez and his wife, Cecilia McDonald, with his one-year-old son.

The take-off was very sad. We flew away from Cuba without knowing when we would return to her, what would happen there, if our exile would be long or short, if we would find enough to subsist in the foreign land, afraid of the thousand tasks which were surely awaiting us; asking ourselves when we would be once more with our family and our friends; and conscious of our responsibility to those five little ones who, full of cheer and ignorance, were fully living the novelty of their first airplane trip and the attraction of the unknown.

It was logical that we would break down and cry when we could no longer see Havana. How many thoughts and feelings were thrown together inside of us! Fortunately, the trip itself could not have been better, and the kids enjoyed it the whole way. Not one turbulence, no motion sickness, not even from Mari Carmen, who had just turned five. Miryam was seven, and the boys nine, ten, and eleven.

Miami - July 15, 1961

It has been precisely six months since I started this scrapbook. Within a few hours, it will be our first year anniversary of exile, and time is more and more scarce for writing, and even for doing the most indispensable things. Day by day I feel more tired, more exhausted, more sad, more hopeless with respect to Cuba. These last few months, especially, have been a terrible test for the Cubans, and we've kept track of what has been happening there. It seems so remote to me, the day we reached this American land!

The trip had been pretty good, the kids enjoyed the plane a lot, but we left with a lot of delay, and later the paperwork at Immigration, the fifteen suitcases we were carrying, only my English to understand ourselves, the renting of a car so we could drive ourselves, learning the layout of the city, leaving most of our luggage at the airport so that we could all fit with a few bags in the car, took us various hours. It was past ten when we left, and in our recently-arrived confusion, we got lost and found ourselves in Hialeah, a suburb of Miami in the opposite direction of the beach, where we were headed.

It rained. The kids were hungry and tired. We couldn't find whom to ask. At last we stopped at a hospital, and a nurse gave us directions. We arrived at the Berkeley Shores Hotel on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach around midnight. A Cuban couple who lived there offered us a glass of milk for the kids, for it was too late to buy anything. We got two rooms, and even though Alberto Gutiérrez had recommended it as inexpensive, within a week we had to abandon it for another one in the same neighborhood which came out at less than half: the Dolores Apartments, which like Rubén says, was more Dolores than Apartment.

The heat, the crowding, the disorder in the small space, and too much luggage, having to throw the mattresses on the floor each night so that we doubled the beds, having to quiet the kids, who were accustomed to being loud and running around... were unforgettable days.

Immediately we got in contact with Elio Alvarez, with José Ignacio Rasco, President of the Democratic Christian Movement (DCM), with Gladys Romney, recently married in Miami to an American. Rubén enrolled in the DCM, and they put him in charge of working at the Propaganda Commission, offering him \$450, which in three months became \$350. With that we began immediately to look for a house, which was a difficult thing, having so many kids. Seven or eight blocks away was the Church and the Catholic school of St. Michael, where

we enrolled the four older kids, and the house was only \$100/month furnished. It was extremely dirty, and it took a lot of work to get it into shape. It belonged to Mr. W. F. Jamison and his wife, Cecilia, who then and later were very friendly with us.

Next door lived a Cuban family, Alfonso Pérez with his wife and child and his sister-in-law, Addie, a family with whom we got along right away and turned out to be of the best help in the first times of exile. We moved on July 31 in the 1951 Henry J., which for \$80 Rubén had purchased and which even today, a year later, we miraculously maintain. That was the first thing Rubén had to learn in exile; driving a standard shift and this one was one that would stop at any moment and you had to get under the hood to fix it. Under a tremendous deluge, we made our entry into the house.

A few days after we moved, Rubén had to go to D.C. for some psychiatric affair. I stayed alone with the kids. He took advantage and made a connection with Jaime Fonseca of the Catholic News, earning with them a few dollars more to add to our meager income. We began to eat from the cantina that was served each afternoon by Chez Mihlet. In the mornings, I would fix something light for lunch. The thirteenth of August Rubén left for Buenos Aires, in order to attend a congress of the DCM, and from there go on to Lima for a congress of journalists. He was gone about three weeks, in which I went back to being alone, but this time taking care of, besides cleaning and organizing a new house, renewing our visa at Immigration and enrolling the children after a previous visit with Mssr. McKeener, Superintendent General of the Catholic schools of Miami, who gave us a letter of recommendation for the nuns at St. Michael, since there had been some difficulty in enrolling them.

We sent for the school records from Cuba, and we enrolled the kids in the grades which corresponded to them—2nd, 6th, 7th, and 8th. Mari Carmen was not accepted, for being only five, and we had to put her in a private kindergarten of Mrs. Landry, which even though it was the cheapest we could find, cost us \$3/week from 8:30 - 11:30 a.m. For the other four, we paid \$10 at St. Michael's for 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. For thirty-five cents daily besides, they each got lunch. At first they had a very hard time with the language, especially the smaller ones, but little by little, they learned it and finished the grade with passing marks and a very good handle on the language for the older ones.

From Lima, Rubén brought for Mari Carmen a little alpaca stuffed animal, which she named Chiviricoco, and even now at one year, it's still her favorite companion day and night, for she has not slept once without it.

The house was furnished, although with old pieces of furniture. The living room ones, especially, were pretty trashed, and we were able to exchange them for two sofas which they made available to us in much better condition, and we brought them on a rented trailer, pulled by our car. On the roof of the same, we also brought a second-hand bed we bought. Also an ironing board, another cot for Luis Eduardo, whom a year later still is sleeping on it, and kitchen utensils and indispensable cleaning supplies. Gladys Romney loaned us her china and silverware she wasn't using. A fifteen dollar radio (which later had to be returned for money) completed our new installation, and we began to live this new chapter.

Recently arrived in Miami, Rubén spoke with a radio station in New York, whose programs were taped in Miami in the "hour against the Castro government," in which Pepita

was a broadcaster and which at the time had a fantastic rating in Cuba. He made a calling to fight against Fidel Castro. He wrote a manifesto in the name of the DCM, which was later translated to English, directed to the Catholics, which was distributed at all the masses in Miami one Sunday¹, and was read on the radio station. After coming back from South America, he also gave three talks on the radio, concerning the Congresses he had attended. And all this earned him an attack by the most hated commentator of Fidel, José Pardo Llada, who within a year, wound up in Mexico, asking for asylum.

Day by day more of our Cuban friends were arriving in Miami, convinced the same as us of the necessity of leaving the island. In exile the friendships got stronger and we enjoyed spending large amounts of time with them, speaking about how to resolve the Cuban situation, remembering with nostalgia the fatherland and exchanging news. Our most frequent outing became going to the airport to await family and friends. Some of them even spent the first night at our house, while they got oriented.

It wasn't until December of 1960 that the Center for Refugees, which the American government organized to receive Cubans which were by then coming in the hundreds and thousands, functioned, and then in a limited form. In Miami, we also found living there from a long time back, my ex co-worker, Lillian Whitmarsh, married to an American, and Ana Arroyo, an ex-Federada. Both tried a lot to direct us in our new life. The first exiled Cubans that we found the day following our arrival at the mass in Miami Beach were Rogelio de la Torre and others; later we found others and various patients of Rubén. Later Jorge Diez arrived and rented a house across the street from ours, where later came his sister, Nenita and René Alonso with their children.

Upon returning from his trip, he found me with a tremendous ear infection, which was not the only of the many illnesses and sufferings that we all endured in Miami. One which never really did heal was that of my hands (which either because of an allergy to the detergent or because of the humidity in my new life, in which for the first time I had so much to clean and wash) were always itching me, oozing pus, and they came to pain me a great deal. There was no money even for gloves, nor for medications, and these had to be sent from Cuba with some exile who was coming. The joints of my hands were also inflamed, perhaps from ringing out so many sheets and towels, and there were days in which I couldn't even close them, continually waking up in the night from the pain.

The mosquitoes and the heat were unendurable, as was later the cold, when winter came a little while after moving to the city, and we were hit by Hurricane Donna, which is remembered as one of the worst in the history of Miami. The uncertainty, the economic instability, the pain of Cuba, made us live continually on edge. The kids, however, were happy living these "vacations" which were indefinitely lengthening. They enjoyed much more freedom, acquired many friends, and quickly learned English. They would have fun in the yard spraying themselves with hoses or picking the most beautiful lemons from our tree, which later they would sell in the neighborhood or make lemonade. Everything was a new impression for them, and they lived on the margin of the tragedy that we ourselves lived.

¹ These were distributed on the windshields of cars in the parking lots of Catholic churches in Miami, not inside the churches themselves.

The situation in Cuba worsened with tremendous speed: nationalization of all businesses, confiscation of American property; the closing of Catholic schools and later expulsion of the clergy; imprisonments, jailings, firing squads, general terror. Fidel had reunited with Nikita Khrushchev at the U.N., and Rubén published a pamphlet about the appearance of Fidel at the U.N. Other pamphlets followed, to be dispersed especially in Latin America. He had been named to the Office of Propaganda, which was in Coral Gables and published some policy papers weekly, to be distributed to thousands in South America besides some other propaganda materials. His main collaborators there were Fermín Peinado and later Angel del Cerro, who finally became convinced that what was in Cuba was Communism.

He worked actively in the DCM, whose internal problems were affecting him a great deal and robbed him of lots of time, energy, friendships, and peace. The nervous tension was enormous. Even though all the hopes were pinned on the Camps, which were surrounded by mystery, where it was said that the American government was training Cubans for an invasion very soon.

At the beginning of November 1960, we got an unexpected call from Cuba. Carucha asked us to locate in Miami her husband's father, who had lived there for many years, divorced and remarried, so that he or one of Tony's aunts could quickly deposit money for the plane fare for her and Tony, for they had to immediately leave the country. She was already close to giving birth, and that's how they arrived and came to stay in my house until after the birth of the daughter.

Our house in Havana, with all its furniture and other objects that we had entrusted to them, were thereby lost. A family that Zoila assured us would keep them until our (at that time) probable return, would keep everything for us at the same time that they used them. In our house in Miami there arose a great haste, making room as soon as we could for Tony and Carucha in one of the three little bedrooms we had. More children had to go to sleep in the living room on canvas cots. The chores of the house and the tension grew upon me; the drop-in visits and phone calls were continuous.

Shortly before Carucha gave birth, Zoila also arrived in Miami to be able to meet her new grandchild. It was now totally impossible for her to stay in our house, so at night she went to sleep at the house of her niece, Marta Alvarez, who had also just gone into exile. And then she'd come early in the morning to pass the day in the house. Meanwhile, Tony had found some work as a typist in the offices of the DCM, and with that, was able to go live on his own after the birth by Carucha in an apartment only three blocks from the house. Estela Rosa was born at Mercy Hospital, the same day as Carucha's birthday--January 2, 1961. Rubén and I were the godparents, and we baptized her in our parish of St. Michael's. In February, Zoila returned to Cuba.

Coincidentally with Carucha's trip, there arrived in Miami my brother Tavito, with his wife and four children, the youngest one only a year old. Finally and in view of the way things were turning in Cuba, he had decided to go ahead with the exile, he who had previously so refused.

Behind he left a most gorgeous house, just built (they moved in while we were already in Miami), and his thriving Fábrica de Huatas (batting factory) to which he had dedicated

long years of work and intense effort. The day after leaving Cuba, the factory was confiscated by the State, so at least he was spared seeing it in the hands of strangers.

From Cuba they'd gone to New Orleans to the home of an aunt of Charo, where they stayed a few days, but right away he wanted to leave for Miami to reunite with us. I had been unable to find them a house close to mine--as he had assigned me--so from minute one, they had to stay at our place. I asked Carucha and Tony to leave for a week and stay with his aunt until something showed up for Tavito, and so we squeezed in Lourdes, Nancy, Beatriz, Junior, Tavito, and Charo. Those were days in which we were piled up, but Charo took on the greatest part of the work.

At last they found a house to rent and decided to stay in Miami through Christmas (the first in exile), by our side. Already Tavito had made arrangements with Mr. Lenz, his old partner in the National Batting Company, and among the various offers they made him, he accepted that of Chief of Production in a factory just installed by William T. Burnett in the little town of Statesville, N.C. At the beginning of January 1961, they all went to Panama to secure American residency, and from there to start their new home in Statesville, where they were received with open arms.

The first Christmas in exile, therefore, we passed pretty much with family: Tavito and his family, Zoila, Carucha, and Tony, and lots of friends and acquaintances. Pepita was also still in Miami. We all prayed and trusted that it would be our only Christmas out of Cuba.

Mari Carmen remained quite happy in her kindergarten, with a superb teacher, Mrs. Landry, whom she loved a lot. She went daily in the morning with the second child of the Gutiérrez-Rosell family, María Cristina, who was her inseparable friend during our stay in Miami.

We started the year with the bad luck of an accident with our "Henry J." It wasn't insured, and the other party demanded a lot of money for his car repair. At last, after much pleading and insisting and I myself going to cry to a man explaining our situation, he let it go at \$100, which for us represented an enormous fortune.

Luis Eduardo had joined the Boy Scouts of the parish, and although his troop was pretty lousy, he had a good time in the few outings they went on.

In March of 1961 a very important character made his debut in my home; a second- or third-hand washing machine, whose cost--\$57--my brother had sent me from his first savings with his job. It was marvelous for me, for my hands were worse than ever, and the trips to the laundromat (sometimes after nightfall, when all the kids were asleep) would exhaust me. There were so many children, and they got dirty playing, we always had so many guests, that the piles of dirty laundry were enormous.

Carlos Alberto was the one who kept getting worse with asthma, with which he'd suffered since he was small. The conditions of our life in Miami were not the most appropriate; besides the climate, which was a lot more humid. The dust, the crowding, the old dirty mattresses, the filthy rugs which I decided at last to get rid of even though it later cost me varnishing the floor, the few medications (which even for Rubén, it was difficult to buy without an American doctor's prescription), and the thousand stresses of exile had him

in a continual attack. There were nights when it was necessary to rush him at midnight to Jackson Memorial Hospital so they could give him oxygen, for he could barely breathe.

Besides asthma, Carlos remained the Champion of the Accidents. The day I went to buy the washing machine, the kids remained at home playing. In one of their races, Carlos struck with full force the front door of the house, which was all of glass, and which one of his brothers had just slammed. He hit in particular with both forearms. The door turned to shards, and glass drove into Carlos' arms, cutting mainly the veins at the right wrist. The loss of blood was so great that later my Cuban neighbors, the Perez family, told me they had to hose down the porch, so I would not be shocked on my return at the sight of so much blood.

When I absolutely had to go out, I would ask the neighbors to keep an eye on the kids. The moment the accident happened, an American lady who lived in the same block was passing by in her station wagon and offered to take Carlos to the hospital. In the car went her son, a schoolmate of Carlos, who seeing that the blood would not be contained, took his T-shirt off and wrapped it around Carlos' wrist. As a result, the wounds got infected. Carlos was pretty bad off. He had lost much blood, they had to give him a bunch of stitches, and although he was quite allergic to the toxoid, there was no choice but to inject him to prevent tetanus. The asthmatic reaction which he had a few days hence was the worst we could remember, and for weeks he was in a very delicate state.

Nonetheless, he finished his grade satisfactorily, the same as his brothers. They had all enrolled in the next grade that corresponded to them, just as if they had continued in Cuba, so it turned out that all three boys were one year ahead of the average American child. Rubén G. graduated from 8th grade before turning thirteen; Luis E. finished 7th before turning twelve, and Carlos A. the 6th sixth grade before turning eleven.

Rubén Gustavo went and joined the baseball team of St. Michael's School. At the end of the school year, they celebrated with a meal and gave him the "Most Valuable Player" trophy for baseball. In this picture, he's with the coach, the parish priest, and two other boys who got trophies for other sports.

Among the many activities which in the meantime Rubén had were those of the Medical Association in Exile, which together with Enrique Huertas, he helped found and organize towards the end of 1960. Huertas was the first president (and was for many years after) and Rubén the first vice-president.

We happened to be close in the first months of 1961 to what became known as the Generational Crisis, which undermined the unity of the exiles so far achieved in the Revolutionary Front. The Front had formed months before out of (1) the Authentics headed by Tony Varona, (2) the sympathizers of the Popular Party directed by Aureliano Sánchez Arango, (3) the "Montecristi" Group of Justo Carrillo which pulled together a small group of military men, diplomats, etc., (4) the MRR with Manuel Artime as President, which integrated elements for the most part Catholic, many of which came from the Rebel Army, and (5) the DCM with José I. Rasco as President.

Aureliano had been the first to get disgusted with the attitude of the Americans and had left the Front, combining new sectors, one of Authentic youth elements headed by Cobo, and another mainly of colonos with Ricardo Rafael Sardiñas. The four youngest ones of the Front came up with a manifesto of the *Generational Thesis*, which was published on January

28th. The disgust with the other two provoked a total crisis. The Americans then decided to ignore all of them and form a new organ called the Revolutionary Council, which was joined by the party of Manolo Ray, Tony Varona and Justo Carrillo, Artime (who vetoed the vice-president of the MRR who had been acting while Artime spent time in the military training camps), and some individual personalities. Later the DCM also came on line. Council President was named Dr. José A. Miró, first Premier of the Revolution after the fall of Batista. We were not aware of how close the invasion was already; it was surprising how one could see things accelerate.

In Miami in the meantime there spread a fever to enlist in the campamentos. Cubans came from everywhere to conscript. Already since February Rubén had enlisted in the Army, but thanks to the insistence of mainly Dr. Gurri, they decided to transfer him to the Medical Corps of the invasion. He was the only psychiatrist of some forty doctors enlisted. It was decided that they not go to the training camps, but that they train in Miami proper on Medicine of War. They were outfitted head to toe (including two pairs of combat boots which they were asked to start wearing in order to break them in), they were vaccinated, they were relieved from being on guard at the hospitals so they could leave at a moment's notice, etc. Rubén had resigned from the Office of Propaganda and started pulling in \$400/month as a doctor's salary, which I was to cash while he was in combat. Even though the hopes for victory were enormous, as we knew we had the U.S. behind us, it was a tremendous decision for us to have to separate, me staying in Miami with the children until we could return to reunite in Cuba, by then free of Communism.

Quite a bit later than Rubén and after much indecision, Tony had also conscripted in the Army. On April 7, out of the blue, they notified him at home that there was an open seat in the next plane leaving that afternoon in the group--as we later learned--which would next take off for the training camps, and that same afternoon, he departed. Our surprise to learn that ten days later, the Invasion of Playa Girón was carried out was enormous. Right away, Rubén got his troop assignment and more than once, we said good-bye, thinking that the Medical Corps would then be sent.

The news, however, began to reach us; at first contradictory and later frankly pessimistic. The hours and days of anguish and expectation that began to be suffered would later extend indefinitely. All Miami was waiting on word from Girón, and at last there came the confirmation of the complete disaster, of the lack of American cooperation, of the deaths and imprisonment of the invaders, their appearance on Cuban TV (a program we had heard on radio in Miami, hearing directly from his own lips Tony's name), the closing of the recruitment offices, etc., etc.

Those were unforgettable days of suffering. First and foremost was the defeat in Cuba, whose full import we immediately understood. It was not a battle lost, but the prestige and confidence in the Americans, the collapse of all hopes of freeing ourselves from Communism, and a transcendental event which would keep reverberating for long years in the history of Cuba and the U.S., as in effect happened.

The search to try to locate Tony, the phone calls to and from Cuba to find out about Tony and if Rubén had gone to Cuba, the deaths and wounds of so many of our friends, the persecution unleashed in Cuba arresting thousands of our people, the scenes and stories of

terror which kept arriving. For days, we lived stupefied, unable to but cry at all hours. And yet, blessing God that Rubén had not had to go.

In our personal realm, we were also very affected economically. Rubén received one more check and then became totally without income, for no way was he going to accept the salary they offered since he was not to provide any labor. Carucha came to live with us--she and the child--for a few months when Tony entered prison. Finally we decided to turn to the Refugee Center and began to receive \$100/month which the American government issued to each family and which went entirely to rent. Fortunately they gave us a portion of food (powdered milk, flour, rice, beans, sugar, powdered eggs, lard...) with which we tried to solve the problem of getting fed.

Since January, Rubén had started to write gratis a series of "Cartas al Comandante" for the *Diario Las Américas*. Now he started to write for money for the N.C. and for the U.S. Information Service (USIS), but this did not go far; it was little and sporadic. There came to be not one cent in the house even to replace the boys' worn-out shoes. It's not surprising, for example, that one night we went like indigents to the river shore to look through a shipment of bananas which had gone overripe to see if we could find some that we could eat.

In May, Rubén made a decision. Playa Girón having failed, we had to face up to the reality that we would have many years of exile before us. There were five children to maintain, and he had a career that he could practice in the future in the U.S. But his command of English was too poor to be able to take the Foreign Medical Exam, so he decided to first enroll in an Intensive English course at the University of Miami. He would go to class in the morning and study in the afternoon.

In June, he started taking a course in Medicine offered at Jackson Memorial Hospital for Cuban doctors wanting to prepare for the Foreign Medical Exam. He spent all summer this way, studying intensely, mainly at night when he had no classes to attend and there would settle some semblance of tranquility in that house which was so small, so uncomfortable, inhabited by so many people. Often daybreak found him studying; needless to say that all the nerves in the house were frayed, and how much one had to put up with and bear in that new stage of preparation and sacrifice of all kinds.

Fun outings had to be very few. There was neither the time nor money for that. The kids had fun their own way in the yard and the neighborhood. They would go alone to the library, run errands for me, take care of Estela Rosa, and their main attraction was going to Miami Beach to swim, but sometimes we didn't even have enough for gas. And Rubén needed the "junker" at all hours for his classes in the University and the Hospital, for his trips to the library, and for the thousand meetings and complications at the DCM.

Another place of interest in that house was the "attic" where, by necessity, we had to keep not only luggage and stuff not needed at the moment, but also things we'd need every so often but could find no nook nor cranny in which to put them. Because of that, we would not go two or three days without Luis, the most agile (there were no stairs to the attic) and the only one who could fit through the tiny opening in the ceiling that went to the attic, having to climb up to get something.

In June, one more heartache was added to what we already endured: the illness and unexpected operation followed by the sudden death of Chichí, Rubén's godmother, who had

so loved Rubén and my children. They all loved her a lot and remembered her constantly. How she herself had suffered with that separation! She died on the 19th in a clinic in Havana.

Taking advantage of the long 4th of July weekend, Tavito and Charo went to see us in Miami. They were happy in Statesville but far away from everything. Miami kept being a boiling pot after the failure at Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs). The subject of the prisoners and of their possible ransom for tractors was always everywhere. We were able to make few outings because "Henry J." every day was more banged up, and it had to last us until the Foreign, which would be in October. It would get stranded continually; it would rain inside same as outside, and in Miami it rains cats and dogs almost daily, we didn't all fit in it, it was all worn out on the inside, although even so, it still provided us with service.

A mysterious and even miraculous thing happened to us these days. A gentleman from Minnesota, who was writing his thesis on Cuba for his study of Latin America, needed to make a survey among Cubans and he wrote to the Cuban Medical Association to see if someone could help him. Rubén found his letter, we got in contact with him, and thanks to the surveys which we did for him, \$250 came to us unexpectedly.

Another day when we didn't have the least hope of getting money which we urgently needed, we got in the mail \$50, which we had put in as a deposit when we got here for the telephone company, which was automatically reimbursed after one year. And so with the help of God, and of many friends who went out of their way to loan us money, we kept enduring the necessary months in order to build ourselves a future.

Albuquerque - January 1962

During the months that we'd spent in exile, we had sadly noticed how ill-informed were the Catholics and the Catholic groups of America, concerning the Cuban situation. Now that the religious persecution turned up on the island, that they confiscated the properties of the church, took over the Catholic schools, that they threw out their religious Orders en masse; even on one day, more than 100 priests and one bishop, they profaned the churches and openly taught Communism and atheism, it became urgent to make known the situation to the hierarchy and Catholic institutions of the continent. What Rubén and I had so desired to do occurred simultaneously to Miguel Suárez, an old Cuban Catholic leader, and with his cooperation, we were able to begin publishing in June of 1961 a bulletin with Catholic news, which we titled "Información Católica Cubana." We wrote it in Spanish for Latin America and later we translated it to English for the U.S. It had much success, and the printing had to be increased month after month. It took time and effort, but it was truly worth it.

In September we had to think again about school for the kids. Mari Carmen was already six years old, and could be admitted to the first grade at St. Michael's after two and a half years in kindergarten and pre-K, and another in Miami. Above in the school photos are shown Luis and Carlos with the horrible haircuts that they would get at the barber academy for only fifty cents. The only ones we could afford, and even that was sacrifice.

By then the Colegio de Belén de Cuba had already been taken over by the Communists; the Jesuit priests had arrived in Miami, and they began a high school in the church of Gesu downtown. Many classmates of Rubén D. began to send children, and of course, we also enrolled Rubén G., who daily had to take the bus to the school.

At last came October, so desired and so dreaded! On the 17th would be the Foreign Medical Exam, which would decide our next destiny. At home sometimes the doctors Casuso and Plutzky came to study, both of whom had a perfect command of English. Rubén felt very insecure, in spite of all that he had studied. It was his whole career, which for many years he had dedicated to psychiatry, and he was not very familiarized in English. The exam was to last all day, 360 questions in the form of multiple choice, and a clinical history to determine diagnosis, prescribe, and prognosticate. They were sealed exams, which on the same day and time would be opened simultaneously around the world.

On the average, one third of those who took it would completely pass; one third would get a good grade but less than 75%, and so were only allowed to practice for two years before which date, they needed to retake the exam. The remaining third would always flunk. The exams were all graded together by IBM in Evanston, Illinois and it would take six weeks to be informed. Those were weeks of uncertainty, anguish, daily wait for the mailman, until finally in the last week of November, we received the letter with the marvelous news that Rubén had passed the exam completely.

During all of these months and especially after the Bay of Pigs, the avalanche of Cuban exiles was tremendous. The news that would reach us from Cuba each time was more painful. Zoila would write us openly about everything, sending the correspondence to the name which we had picked even before we left—Conchita Vidal and later also Manolo Vidal. On the 15th of October in a big sweep that they made in Cuba of the MRP where they imprisoned its leader, Reynaldo Gonzales, they also arrested Héctor René López, cousin of Rubén, and godfather of Carlos Alberto. Everyday the list of our friends who were jailed or shot would grow.

At the beginning of November, Rubén was invited on an all-expense paid trip to Puerto Rico to serve as reporter for a religious event to be celebrated there. He also wrote some reports for the N.C. It was only for a few days, but he much appreciated getting to know Puerto Rico, so similar to Cuba, and it also served him to while away the wait for his grade on the Foreign. As soon as this arrived, he went directly to the V.A. Hospital in Coral Gables to ask for a post in psychiatry. The red tape started, and he sent his resume out.

Doctors Gurri and Casuso gave him some magnificent letters of recommendation. The state hospital in Georgia insisted that he go there. A hospital close to Lexington, KY wrote him several letters inviting him to come. A representative from the University of Morgantown, West Virginia on a trip to Miami, kept pressuring him (until the moment that he had to take his plane back) to become Assistant Professor of Psychiatry with a magnificent salary and even better opportunities in the future. We had bought a big map of the United States, and each night we'd spread it out over the dining room table without deciding where we would go.

There were many things to consider: the health of Carlos; the cold and humid climate of West Virginia; the states that had a lot of obstacles to foreign doctors to later get licensed by the Board; the facilities for college for the boys; Rubén's English, which even though it improved a lot during the course, was still very uncertain and not fluent. We would go to the public libraries to find information regarding the various places where there were vacancies. The V.A. alone offered him fifteen positions.

At the end, after thinking it over a lot, we made the application to the V.A. in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It had been recommended as the ideal climate for asthmatics, a desert climate, high and dry. There was a large Spanish-speaking population, good schools, and a growing city. The position they offered was that of Chief of the Mental Hygiene Clinic Outpatient Service. They offered him a salary of ___ [sic], and he could start January 1, 1962. They'd pay the trip for the whole family as well as the move.

Immediately the fever of preparations started. The Refugee Center gave us each a jacket. We'd get to Albuquerque on the moment of the most intense cold. We decided to spend Christmas in Miami and start the trip on the 29th at 8 a.m.

Carucha organized an early birthday party for Estela Rosa, who would be one on January 2nd, and those are the photos to the left. Also shown in them is Carmencita Lombardero, distant relative of Rubén, whose parents had sent her in the plan of the American government to quickly take out the children under eighteen years old. She stayed at the Kendall Camp close to Miami, and a few weekends we'd go and get her so she could spend time with us. In one of the trips when we were returning to drop her off at camp, our dear car "Henry" stopped working for good.

We said good-bye to our many friends in Miami, and with a debt of over \$1000, without furniture or appliances for the home, with only \$50 in our pocket, and without knowing what this new stage of exile had in store for us, we boarded the plane with our five children and started our new life of work in this great American nation.
