

Migration to U.S.

Cultural and religious bubble

My childhood was seclusive with a strict guidance from the Catholic church. My grandparents were strict followers of the Catholic Church. I was born a premature at the six month and weight one and a half pounds and no incubators. By age of 3 months I was a Gerber baby. A few days after birth I was Baptized due to fear of my demise. By age seven, I had my first communion and at age 11 I had my confirmation. My parents thought I would have to leave Cuba, for fear of being capture by the government and being sent to a Pioneer camp, where I would receive all of the Communist propaganda and new communist laws. (Leninism which include the notion of no God) All the rules and laws of the Province of Galicia, the Catholic rules and regulations were totally overwhelming for an 11-year-old child, who was also having an identity issue at the same time.

My parents were poor but with resilience and determination were able to obtain an education and advance. My mother received all funding and obtained a Doctorate in Education and became a school inspector and my father was well connected and was the head of normal school for the Education Department for the entire island. They were savvy and creative and were able to build a 2-bedroom house in the outside of Havana. They had survived the crisis of having a Downs Syndrome child and be able to have all these accomplishments. My mother was to care for that child until she developed Alzheimer's Disease. All along my entire life I was constantly indoctrinate that the task of caring for my sister, and I was my total commitment.

The bursting of the bubble.

In January 1959, at age 6 I remember the revolt about the city and the disarray of old rules and the advent of others. By 1961 Castro had developed all the same tactics to gain control of the County. The population was living in disarray and Cuba had a population of 6 million at the time. The US was the primary target of immigration. We had an uncle in Miami who invited us to leave. Others went to Central or South America. Spain took many of our citizens and many of those eventually ended up in South Florida.

In 1962 my nuclear family got tickets to leave on a Pam Am flight as my uncle had given affidavits of financial support for the US government. However, we had nothing to take with us but the clothing in our backs. I remember being woken up at 2 AM. The green berets came inside and forced my parents to give up all property including jewels, bank accounts and property. We were taken to the airport and when we got to the immigration desk we were told that all of us could leave and that my sister was not allowed due to her condition. With great disappointment we turned back and had nowhere to go. We were considered non-citizens worms, the scum, traitors and unwanted.

The extensive family is much valued in the Cuban society. We went to live with my maternal mother in a 1 bedroom apartment. My parents slept in the sofa bed with my sister and I slept in a mattress under the dining room table. To resolve this problem, I was to be home school and my parents started to look for any sort of job. I was then sent to live with my paternal grandmother. (The most caring people in my life, however the strictest Catholic) My aunt was also a teacher and taught me upon her return. My grandmother taught me Gallaecian and Spanish cooking. They taught me to iron on the big commercial ironing tables and how to boil clothing in the starch and then iron them without a wrinkle. (Family business out of the home) They had an extensive collection of books, so I read a lot and kept to myself. We were silent on all issues. Castro had appropriated all properties left by the worms. All business, banks accounts and several series of money depreciation. There was a big problem with food, so we were given a money certificate to purchase some items. All contraband was considered reason for encampment or jail. Each block had a Defense Committee whose purpose was to report all movements of household items, furniture. My paternal uncle had left for Mexico as his wife was Mexican. They had lived above and soon after their departure the apartment was occupied by a family of 12. They used the furniture and books for coal. We lived an isolated silent life with a great deal of fear for discernment.

Looking for another bubble.

In 1961 there was Bay of Pigs. In Havana there was some commotion, but soon we heard about the American attempt to get rid of the government, had failed. Soon after came the evacuation of the Cuban American troops we learned of the possibility of leaving Cuba with the ships that were taking back the troops. Once again, my uncle interfered with an affidavit of solvency, thus assuming the cost of having my sister in the US. This time they came for us in the afternoon and were allowed some luggage. We walked a long 2 miles of a fenced narrowed corridor carrying our clothing. Soon, we heard the screaming and shouting of the Cuban supporters who were throwing paint, eggs, and spoiled food over the fence and screaming "Traitors, scum, deserters." We kept on walking until my sister decided to sit on the floor and having spasms and dystonic type of movements. My father gave me his bag and carried my sister on this long walk.

Once again, we were searched, but this time much more rapid than before and led to the desk of the Swiss Embassy. Then we were told that the three of us could leave on the boat but not my sister as she had a condition not accepted by the US. They were kind and offered us to come to Switzerland. We ponder on the idea, but my mother was opposed to let me go alone or for all of us to go. We returned back to the silence and terror.

This time my parents gave me a lot of freedom. I took buses on the weekend to visit my father and the weekdays with my aunt and grandmother. Soon my parents were able to get a job at the Transportation Department; my aunt had been fired for being anti-communist. My paternal grand-father had been able to exchange his apt for a 3-bedroom house. This time we also had my mother's sister and her family of four. This was a joyous time of my childhood, but I still slept in my parents' room on the weekends. Across from my room was Cristopher Columbus

and that was to become my playground. This is a World Historic Site and the beauty of the monuments and rooms became my daily entertainment. Also, we had a TV that played American Movies. I wanted to be in America and my favorite actor was Errol Flynn. Living with the external family

members were a trial itself as it was very structured, with only one bathroom available. We had to be on time for meals and we were not allowed to speak unless spoken to. We had no say so in this infrastructure.

We made it into another bubble

In 1966 there had been little immigration, except for Spain, so Castro decided to let the dissidents out of the country through the Camarioca bay port. The next day thousands of boats had inundated the base of Camarioca. My uncle had rented one of those boats in Miami and was claiming his entire family to come to the US the second day a hurricane schedule to go through Havana and those of the boats were advised to return. However, there was a list of us in case the boats return. Soon Castro agreed to have the US send flights for those that wanted to leave. Again, we got ready to leave and on May 30th, 1966 we were woken up by the green barrettes and at 2 AM we went directly to Jose Marti airport. The search this time was sterner. The women and men were separated. We were moved to a room and a complete, naked search occurred. This was an attempt to see if people were smuggling jewels internally or in their private parts. Some had already eaten their precious jewelry in an attempt to capture these upon their arrival to the US. Some had family members and places to go. Others were reeling on these jewels, the Social Services and the charity of others. Castro was really hungry for money. The economy was in shambles and he took possession of the property of the immigrants, just like Hitler had done with the Jews. We were under the dictatorial left-wing government that had lasted over 50 years. Yes, we had concentration camps, no freedom of speech and little food to eat. All possessions were taken.

By 1966 the Laws that Kennedy passed were in effect and those developmentally disabled were allowed to enter the States. (Kennedy's sister had DD problems and had gone through a lobotomy) My sister was no longer an impediment in the US. We took a 30-minute flight from Havana to Miami and we arrived under an outburst of rain that I had never seen before. Regardless, we were in America.

Conflict resolution in the bubble.

In 1966 Miami was a haven for retirees and Miami Beach was a permanent rental community for the elderly. There was also a great number of African Americans that lived in a cluster of neighborhoods dear downtown Miami. However, the influx of Cubans into the area created a resentment within these established communities, the conflict was mostly over jobs, race or lack of integrations of the American values. Later on, I learned this had Happened to the Irish, European Jews, the Italians, the Puerto Ricans and the Asians. The signs read "No Cubans or

colored people need to apply.” These were mostly in the windows, rental properties. Also, the schools were being integrated. I ended up in a junior high which was mostly Puerto Rican, African American and the new arrivals from Cuba.

I found it odd that blacks had their own neighborhood. In Havana, only the Chinese lived within their quarries. I was abhorred by the inner fights in the hallways and outside the school and on the way home. Most of the fights were initiated by the white boys. I tried to stay away and concentrated on learning English. I was mostly horrified by the conflict over the color of the skin. In Cuba we had little of this issue but there was still prejudice. Even people of color fought within themselves. The lighter they were, the more accepted. The darker blacks were in a different economical society. The mulato was the typical Cuban. Most of my parents’ friends were either black or mulato. There had been a lot of inter-racial marriage between the Spanish and the black slaves. There was a lot of “hanky pranky” in the plantations. When referring to understanding of the races we use “You either come from Dinga or Mandiga.) In Cuba many of the blacks come from the Congo region where these tribes lived. These saying indicated that although you maybe white, you may still have African American blood. Also, our national opera is about a very light mulato girl who falls in love with a white wealthy Criollo, only to find that he is her half-brother. The opera ends with traumatic issues for both of the parents. My observations as a teen ager indicated a great deal of anger, helplessness and a lot of judgement. All these was an inner conflict that was to be on-going and showed itself in the latter riots in the 1980’s and 1990’s. Sadly, it is still unresolved.

Most immigrants and Native Americans were and had been integrated into the American fabric to a certain degree. The concept of Acculturation was necessary to survive and function. In entering the 7th grade I refused to attend ESL classes and was forced myself to be with those that spoke no Spanish. This process went on until my graduation. I tried to change my accent, but it was difficult. Denying the prior cultural values, language was a must in this acculturation process and following the rituals and customs was also essential. I remember the day of the U.S. citizen test. I ended up teaching the inspector the difference between a direct democracy and an indirect democracy. There had been differences in how the City States of Greece had death with these differences. My test lasted only 5 minutes.

In my life time the concept of acculturation has changed into a more interest in developing and your own cultural values and a return to a more self-reflective position. Currently in these trying days the concept remains a wound in the divisive political environment. However, another conflict was brewing in my spirit. I realized that I was different than other boys and that I was attracted to others of my same sex. I was having erotic thoughts, and that was a cardinal sin as per the Catholic Church. During my struggle, I searched for the support of three different priests, only to find rejection, judgement, non-acceptance and austere punishment. During my teens all these conflicts led to a suicide attempt, and I received the help of a social worker and a psychiatrist, who recommended that I leave my life and that my parents support me and accept me as the person that I was. Then came Anita Bryant and her proposition to terminate same sex partnership. This was not only destructive for me but for the entire gay community in Miami. Then Came the Mariel Boatlift which brought another set of Cuban

migrants. This was after the protest and assault to the Peruvian embassy in Havana; a lot of dissidents and well-established artists, writers, gays and lesbians, but also a lot of mentally ill individuals and those who had suffered imprisonment due to deviant and psychopathic behavior. I was hired by Mount Sinai Hospital to deal with this population and also deal with the problems of the aged in the SO BE area. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to deal with many of the concentration camp individuals who were now in their 80's and having difficulties living alone. In this wealth of clients, I was able to digest how culture and the American System can be helpful and hurtful at times. Then came the AIDS epidemic and I personally experience the loss of friends, co-workers and clients.

In the course of my life I have dealt with continuous struggles in conflict resolution, just like others. As I type these last thoughts into my PC I am trying to deal with my end of life issues and solve some of my inner conflicts, Most of all I daily remind myself that I have no or little control of things in life and that the only control I have is how I am going to react to the problems.

