

Short-term Missionary Service in Cuba, 1956-1959

I made it through Customs except for one item that was confiscated: a pair of beige riding pants I had bought in preparation for riding horseback to rural churches. Fidel Castro had landed in Oriente Province on November 30, and the few rebel soldiers who were not killed in the battle on the beach when they arrived had accompanied him into the Sierra Maestra mountains to begin the Cuban Revolution. Customs officials were banning anything that looked vaguely military.

Barbara Smith, whom I had met at the training in Nashville, and Carol English, whom I had met at the Cuba caravan training, met my plane and took me to Colegio Buenavista, where they were assigned as missionaries, until time for my 10:15 p.m. bus to Holguín. José Antonio Borbón, whom I had met when my caravan team was in Preston, was waiting for me in Holguín. He was 18, pastoring a small church near Holguin while studying in high school. Years later we would renew our friendship when he was a pastor in Florida and I was working in Atlanta.

Borbón accompanied me to the Methodist church to meet Dulce Horschek, a nurse who ran the Methodist dispensary in Holguín as well as serving as an assistant to the pastor. After telephoning Báguanos to tell them I had arrived, she took me to her home for lunch. There I met Dr. Carl Stewart, the Oriente District Superintendent. After lunch the Morrell Robinsons, a missionary couple from Mayarí, took me downtown to get a taxi to Báguanos, 32 kilometers from Holguin. The fare was \$3.00 for a 45-minute drive for me and my big suitcase, carry-on bag, briefcase, purse, coat, and umbrella.

In Báguanos I was greeted by Eulalia Cook, Virginia Chapman, and three other household members I had met the previous summer: Gladys Dannery, director of the Methodist School across the street from our house; Clara, our Jamaican maid and cook; and Salvador, Clara's helper. I also met two other members of the household: Belkis Ventura, a teacher in the school; and Lydia Guerra, a home extension worker.

Miss Cook handed me a small accordion and said, "You'll need this in the churches that don't have a piano." I said, "I don't know how to play the accordion," and she replied, "Your resumé says you play the piano, and it can't be that different. You'll need it tonight for our first rehearsal." I took the accordion to the church across the street, and in a couple of hours I learned to play *Silent Night*, *Joy to the World*, and *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. I told Miss Cook we would use those three hymns, and only those three, in the churches without a piano.

My first full day in Báguanos I played the piano for a chapel service at the *Colegio de la Amistad* (Friendship School) at 8:00 a.m. and Miss Cook preached. Virginia left at 8:00 for Holguín with Carolina (our Chevrolet Suburban) full of people. After chapel Miss Cook and I went to Holguín in a taxi, along with three other passengers, to attend District Conference. Dr. Stewart introduced me and asked me to say a few words. Everyone seemed astonished that a brand-new missionary already knew Spanish. The following day, Bishop Branscomb (Bishop of Florida and Cuba) and Harry Denman from the Board of Discipleship in Nashville spoke about plans for an evangelism campaign to be held in January and February.

We had eight Christmas plays on eight successive nights, with rehearsals each day. Some were before December 25 and some after, as the Christmas season in Cuba lasts until January 6th, "*Día de Reyes*" (Kings' Day), when the Wise Men bring gifts to the children. I was intrigued by the Christmas trees – just like at home, except that the trees were palms instead of evergreens. The first Christmas pageant was December 21 at the Báguanos church, which seated 300 and was entirely filled, with another 200 or so standing outside in the rain for the entire program, which lasted from 7:30-11:00 p.m.

Báguanos was a fascinating place. There was the sugar mill, the company store, a guest house for official visitors (where we could request rooms for male visitors, as our household consisted of women only), a movie house that showed a movie every Tuesday night, a one-square-block park in the center of town, club buildings, the Catholic church and rectory, the public elementary school, the Methodist church and school, our missionary house, a bakery, company housing for the sugar mill workers, and small stands that sold groceries and liquor. One building housed the post office and telegraph office and the postmaster's home. There were two doors, one marked *Telegramas* (telegrams) and the other *Correos* (Mail). If you entered the *Telegramas* door you found yourself at the mail window; the *Correos* door led to the telegraph window. There was no mail delivery; everyone went to the post office to get the mail.

We lived in a house provided by the sugar mill company that owned the entire town. The Methodist Church building and the Methodist School building across the street from our house were owned by the Methodist Church, since the street marked the end of the town limits. Our house, the *Casa de la Amistad* (Friendship House), served as a community center and a gathering place for youth. The school was "*Colegio de la Amistad*" (Friendship School),

with 80 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. To attend high school, students traveled each day by commercial bus to Holguín.

Almost all the men worked for the sugar mill. They earned good wages during the sugar harvest, three to five months a year, when the mill was operating. The rest of the year they bought things on credit at the company store, and by the time the mill started up again they had already spent most of their future earnings. It reminded me of Tennessee Ernie Ford's song, "Sixteen Tons," which says "I owe my soul to the company store."

Methodist work began in Báguanos in 1941, when Rev. Garfield Evans, the Oriente District Superintendent, secured permission from the sugar mill administrator to begin a Methodist congregation there. He appointed Lorraine Buck and Rosa María Sueiro to start churches in that area. The next year, Miss Buck was replaced by Eulalia Cook. As she began her work, she stood on a hilltop overlooking Báguanos and the surrounding valley and prayed, "God, I claim this whole area for you." Miss Cook was from South Carolina, where her brother was a District Superintendent. She raised money from U.S. churches to help the new congregation construct a building for the *Iglesia Metodista "El Buen Pastor"* (Good Shepherd Methodist Church).

By 1956 that congregation had become part of the Báguanos circuit, with mission churches extending outward for about 20 miles. There were six stucco church buildings; others, like most homes in the countryside, had palm bark walls and thatched roofs. Still others met in homes, or outdoors beneath shade trees. The mission churches were in La Criolla, Báguanos Viejo, La Levisa, Alcalá, Potrerillo, La Trocha, Guiral, La Caimana, San Juan de las Puercas (St. John of the Pigs – the name of the community, not the church), Ceuta, Manguito, Tacajó, La Trocha, and Cañamazo -- known by its residents as Sal Si Puedes (Leave If You Can), which was inaccessible during rainy season.

Learning about my responsibilities in so many churches, choirs, and youth groups – as well as teaching English and physical education (definitely not my specialty!) in the Methodist school in Báguanos – I soon felt overwhelmed. Early one morning I went to the church, knelt at the altar and prayed, "Lord, I cannot do all these things. I am not prepared. I am not good enough at any of it. There is no way I can do it on my own. Please help me and I will do the best I can." From that moment I never doubted that God was with me, even in the most difficult of times.

I wrote in my journal on Sunday, December 23: "There's never ever been a Christmas Sunday so wonderful! I played the piano for the opening and closing exercises of Sunday School in the Báguanos church and taught the Primary class; held choir practice after Sunday School; taught the Intermediate Sunday School class in the Iglesia del Valle this afternoon and played the accordion for the opening exercises there. Tonight I played for the service at Báguanos, then went to the West Indian church for the Christmas pageant. They asked me to sing a solo, so I sang 'O Holy Night.' Every time I visit a church for the first time they introduce me and ask me to say a few words, and I'm often called on for prayer."

It was rumored that the Castro rebels were planning an attack somewhere in Oriente Province on Christmas Eve. The soldiers in the barracks down the road from our house were on alert; young men were not allowed on the streets after 9:00 p.m.; no mass meetings could be held, although church services were allowed; fireworks were forbidden; buses were stopped and searched by the army.

My Christmas Eve celebration began with a prayer meeting in English, from 6:30-8:00 a.m., at the home of a West Indian church member who was ill. There I learned a spiritual I have loved ever since: "The Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is to follow."

I enjoyed the quaint way of speaking and praying in the Jamaican congregation. One prayer that night was that God would send His peace and blessing down to "this old world what is being dragged to and fro like a drunken man." Miss Cook told me that once when she was leaving for a furlough in the United States, Mr. William Sterling, a Jamaican in his 80s who was the lay leader, prayed, "Lord, bless our missionary, Miss Cook, who is about to take the wings of the morning and fly away unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

At a subsequent meeting, called to elect delegates to the district conference in Preston, the following business took place:

Mr. James (church treasurer): "I elects Mr. Sterling as our delegate."

Mr. Sterling (lay leader): "I elects Mr. James as our substitute."

Mr. James: "Well, now that's settled. Who else wants to go?"

Two other people gave their names. However, on Friday morning as we got ready to go, there were 12 of us. That wasn't too crowded, as we had a nine-passenger Suburban. But on the way home, two ladies – each weighing around 300 pounds – wanted a ride to their home in Guaro, about halfway to Báguanos, so we took them.

The afternoon of *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve), Miss Cook and I visited homes in La Criolla. She took gifts – nuts, cans of soup, seeds to plant, and baby clothes. That evening we had the traditional *lechón asado* (roast pig) and then the *velada* (pageant), for which I played the portable pump organ and sang a solo. On Christmas Day, Miss Cook and I went to the Agricultural School near Preston for Christmas dinner at the home of Richard and Juliet Milk. I met little Ann, who is now a pastor's wife in Virginia, and the other Milk children. After a Christmas candlelight service in Báguanos that evening, Raúl Avila and Geóbel González, two of the youth, came to our house and sang Christmas carols to Miss Cook and me. The others in our household had gone home for Christmas.

Virginia Chapman had returned from Florida by New Year's Eve, and Barbara Anne Smith, Claribell Gallivan, and Carol Jones had come to visit. The watchnight service began at 11:00 p.m., and at five minutes to 12:00 everyone knelt in prayer so that the New Year would find us on our knees. Miss Cook asked the missionaries and lay preachers to kneel at the altar, and everyone else knelt at their pews. The church bell rang at midnight and we all wished each other a happy New Year.

In January 1957 I began teaching English to fifth graders and Bible to seventh and eighth graders at the *Colegio de la Amistad*. I also took my turn leading the devotional for early morning chapel services, was the substitute P.E. teacher, and coached the boys' baseball team. One day Elier, one of my English students, was watching me type a letter to my mother. He found it strange that I was writing in English. "Can she read English?" he asked me. "Are you sure she can read English?" He couldn't understand why anyone wouldn't prefer Spanish, because it's much easier than English! I also began to teach literacy to adults, one on one, with materials Eulalia Cook and others had prepared based on the Laubach literacy method. Years later, Alfalit, a literacy organization initially based in Costa Rica and later in Florida, was established by Miss Cook and her colleagues.

From January through March, Miss Cook was in Matanzas helping organize a Department of Rural Work at the ecumenical seminary, leaving Virginia and me in charge of the Báguanos circuit. I wrote in a letter: "What does a rural missionary do? The answer is 'Everything.' I teach piano to girls from some of the churches; direct three choirs; play piano, portable organ, or accordion in worship services; help youth groups plan programs and recreation; drive our Chevrolet station wagon 'Carolina'; do visitation; and preach when necessary (this will be good for a laugh from my college friends who know how dead set I was against women preachers)."

I became very close to many of the youth I worked with, including Orestes and Raúl Avila, Ceferino Pavón, Lidia Rodríguez, Magaly and Cuca García, Oneida Aguilera, Adela Delange and her little brother Santiago; Geóbel González, who at 15 served as Sunday School superintendent at the mission church in La Caimana; Alberto Williams, president of the youth group at the English-speaking church who came to our house every Saturday to shine our shoes; and Mercedes Tomlinson of the English-speaking church, who now lives in New York City.

One outstanding sixth grader was Arminda Font, a teenager living in La Levisa. As a child she had gone to a public school for two years, taught many of the people in her family and neighborhood to read, and served as the impetus for establishing the church there by sharing with everyone in her neighborhood the Bible stories she learned at our school. She came to Báguanos by bus after walking to the highway from her house on the dirt road that goes through her community. After only two years of education, she entered fifth grade at our school, and passed the fifth-grade final exams with flying colors.

In addition to the missionaries and school staff, I had many young adult colleagues (some paid, but mostly volunteers): Roy Rodríguez, in charge of the Cañamazo mission and Sunday School superintendent at La Criolla; Miguel Angel Osorio, lay pastor at the Guiral church -- a tin roof (no walls), with logs for benches, where he went by horseback as there was no road; Noria Hidalgo, a graduate of the Agricultural School who was the teacher at the one-room school (grades one through three) in La Levisa; Onoides Suárez, local preacher in charge of the La Levisa church; Remigio Marrero, a faithful member at La Levisa and a willing helper for Onoides; Amable Albertériz, in charge of the *Iglesia del Valle*; Cati Martín and Belkis Ventura, teachers in the *Colegio de la Amistad*; José Alberto Borbón, pastor of the church in San Juan de las Puercas; and Angel Alvarez, who was pastoring seven churches while attending high school in Holguín.

I also had some very special adult friends: Consuelo Alfonso, who had come to Báguanos as a young single woman to work with Miss Cook, and her husband Armando Blanco; the Gordillo family, who lived across the street from us; Raquel and Sixto Pérez and their daughter Raquelín, who lived beside the church; and the Arsenio Aguilera family, who lived a block away. Arsenio was the Sunday School Superintendent and lay leader in Báguanos and helped out at the *Iglesia del Valle* in Báguanos Viejo and "El Milagro" church in La Levisa. He was the *Jefe de Batey* (town administrator) for the sugar mill company, and often used the company jeep to take people and/or equipment wherever his four-wheel-drive vehicle would go. He and his wife Luisa had 11 children.

The leader of the La Criolla congregation was Iluminado Hidalgo, who sold insurance and gave away Christian tracts to his customers. His daughter Noria is now a retired pastor in Havana, and his daughter Teresa married Gerardo Martínez, a pastor who transferred to the Florida Conference and died a few years ago.

A trip to San Juan de las Puercas for the dedication of their new church building was a typical travel experience. Virginia Chapman and I; Orestes Avila, who drove Carolina; and two passengers left Báguanos at noon for the 2:00 p.m. service. We had removed the back seat in order to take our portable organ, so five was a comfortable number. Just before Holguín we turned onto a road that we had been assured was passable, as the five rivers we had to cross – with no bridges -- were quite low. The first river was not too deep, but the brakes got wet and stopped working. We had to go up and down some steep hills, but we were able to drive downhill in low gear. When we got to the church we stopped with the emergency brake. We found that a group of Methodists from Florida, along with the District Superintendent, Dr. Stewart, had left their cars at La Criolla and continued their trip in a jeep driven by Elizabeth Beale, the Agricultural School nurse. Borbón and Dulce Horschek had come by bus.

After the service Borbón and Dulce got on the bus for Holguín. We started out with Dr. Stewart and Brother Touchston from Florida in our car, as the jeep they had come in was crowded with nine people in it. We got stuck in the mud, but three of the men pushed and we drove right out. Soon afterward we saw the bus for Holguín, broken down, but there was no sign of our Holguín people. We found them farther on, with a dentist from Holguín who sometimes helped in the dispensary. They were walking toward the highway many miles away and would have to wade across five rivers. We picked them up and asked our two extra passengers to ride in the jeep again. We learned later that the jeep broke down and two men had to walk eight kilometers to get help.

That year's *zafra* (sugar cane harvest) had started by mid-January. The sugar mill began operations, and we had electricity 24 hours a day! Except during *zafra*, the electricity was on only during daylight, and without electricity there was no running water. Even more important, the men now had work instead of being idle.

On February 1st, I went with Miguel Angel Osorio, Remigio Marrero, and Orestes Avila to a service at Guiral, riding Oso, a horse belonging to the mission. Going around a curve too fast and with stirrups too long for me to reach, I fell off the horse. I was not badly hurt – just a bruised shoulder, a gash in one eyebrow, and a black eye. I remounted and we got to the church in time for the service, led by David Reece, a visiting minister from the USA. He and Alberto Williams had gone out in the *gascar*, also called a *motor* (a one-car vehicle that ran on the railroad track). One family in Guiral, the Perdomos, had eight children including Ediltrudis, a student at the Agricultural School; Hildelisa, who attended our school in Báguanos, commuting on the *motor*; and triplets named Fe, Esperanza and Caridad (Faith, Hope and Charity).

After my fall from Oso, I decided to buy my own horse, since we could not get to several of our rural missions in the car during rainy season. My horse, a young mare, had not been ridden, so Orestes Avila's brother Alberto, who was very good with horses, broke her in for me. She had a star-shaped white spot on her forehead, so I named her Lucero ("guiding light" or "star" in Spanish), but everyone called her Lucy. She was gentle and smooth to ride, except that she hated water. Rather than go through a stream she would jump over it, so I became adept at staying on during her long jumps.

Our new 1957 Chevrolet Suburban, "Carolina IV," was delivered in April. It was the fourth car the mission had owned (all named Carolina, for Miss Cook's home state). Because of the rough roads and constant use, cars did not last long. By then we were living in a climate of fear and suspicion due to the Revolution. High school students were no longer traveling to Holguín as classes had been suspended for the rest of the school year. At the army post there were guards with rifles on their shoulders, pistols at their waists, and machine guns in their hands. Whenever we traveled outside of Báguanos, there were many checkpoints. Buses often ran late because passengers and luggage were inspected several times along the way.

Our churches ministered to soldiers on both sides of the conflict: the Batista soldiers in town, the rebels in the countryside. We had safe-conduct passes from both the army and the rebels, and had to remember which one to use at each checkpoint. Soldiers would go to a house after midnight to arrest someone, take him out and shoot him. The people they killed were "the enemies of Batista" – often boys of 16 to 18, usually high school students. College and high school students were considered revolutionaries, and it was a crime punishable by death to be seen in a high school uniform. The Constitution had been suspended and there was no freedom of speech, press, or assembly.

In May a remarkable thing happened – I won first prize in baking at the La Criolla Fair! Daddy's attempts to teach me cake decorating had failed, but I actually made a cake and decorated it to look exactly like the La Criolla church. The thatched roof was made of chocolate cookies, the tower and bell were made of paper covered with chocolate, the steps were square cookies, the trees were green candy, and the doors and windows were painted with

a toothpick dipped in chocolate. It was a white cake, with white icing made of Crisco and powdered sugar, just like Daddy used to make.

I undertook the project of getting people in La Levisa inoculated against typhoid as part of the health work of our circuit under the supervision of Lydia Guerra. There were two cases of typhoid there, but the doctors in the government hospital didn't want it known that they had a case of typhoid in their hospital. Finally they gave me the vaccine and the name of a man who lived near La Levisa who was qualified to administer it. I visited every house in La Levisa asking people to get the shots. Noria Hidalgo had told the school children and their parents that they should be vaccinated, but due to fear and superstition, they had said they would not do it. I talked with the Báguanos nurse practitioner (we had no doctor) about the disease, and read about it in a medical book. At each house, I told them about typhoid and said we would meet in the church Monday night, rain or no rain, to talk about good health practices.

That Monday night it rained, but Lydia, Orestes Avila and I went to the church anyway and found about 75 people there – a very good crowd during a rain. Lydia told them about boiling water and milk and other good health practices, and I answered questions about typhoid as though I were a real authority. I had the book with me, which was in English but had pictures of germs and flies and other such things. In the following weeks about 150 people – almost the entire population of La Levisa – were injected, receiving all three shots to be fully immunized.

In June I learned that my mother had been named Career Woman of the Year by the Lamesa Business and Professional Club. They gave her a silver cup, engraved with her name and newly bestowed title. When I went home on vacation in January 1958, she gave me the cup to be used as a portable baptismal font in our mission churches. When I returned to Báguanos in 1995, I found the cup still there, in a closet at the parsonage.

At the 1957 Annual Conference, Eulalia Cook was appointed to the seminary in Matanzas, and Armando Rodríguez, a recent seminary graduate, was appointed pastor of the Báguanos and Tacajó churches. Virginia Chapman was “missionary in charge” of the circuit and I was her assistant. Armando and his wife Alida, with their baby, moved into a rented home in Tacajó, but we prepared a spare room for them to use when they needed to stay in Báguanos overnight. At that conference I was named editor of the page “*A Través de la Isla*” (“Throughout the Island”) in the national Methodist magazine, *El Evangelista Cubano* (The Cuban Evangelist).

In August I spent a month's vacation in Texas. My sister Carol and her husband Rodney Williams met my plane in Dallas and I spent the weekend with them in Rochester. They were expecting their first child, Beverly, who was born November 2, 1957. As we left the airport, I remarked that it was wonderful to be riding through the countryside without being stopped at a checkpoint. Not long afterward, we were stopped at a checkpoint by state troopers who were inspecting each car to see if it might be carrying two recently escaped prisoners. From Rochester I went to Lamesa and enjoyed a relaxing month with my parents.

By November we were living in an atmosphere of fear. At night we could hear the sound of jeeps coming and going at the army barracks a block from our house. We never knew how many young men were arrested each night. The charge was the same for all: “*Fidelistas*” (followers of Fidel). Church services throughout the Oriente Province were held in the daytime, as people were afraid to go out after dark. The pre-seminary students in Holguín could not attend their missions, as leaving town required a special pass.

Five of the country's most eminent Presbyterian ministers were in hiding, being hunted by the army – to be shot if found. The son of Dr. Alfonso Rodríguez Hidalgo, president of the seminary in Matanzas, was wanted for treason. His only crime: his fiancée's father had been executed for being a revolutionary. Nilo Díaz de Arce, a leading Methodist in Havana, was arrested for operating a clandestine radio station which broadcast news from the Sierra Maestra. Everyone who had any relationship with him was arrested, including the members of the Boy Scout troop of which he was the leader.

The government ordered sugar mills to begin the *zafra* (sugar cane harvest) a month early, at the beginning of December, because the rebels were burning cane fields in an attempt to cripple Cuba's economy. The Báguanos sugar mill began work, but was producing hardly any sugar, because the cane cutters were afraid to go into the fields. The army then said it would kill anyone who refused to work, so the workers were forced to go into hiding or join the rebels. Meanwhile, their families were starving.

The most horrendous time for me personally is described in my journal entry for December 1, 1957, 11:20 p.m.:

I hope I shall never have to live through another day like today. Early this morning someone discovered a fire in a cane field near La Caridad, between La Criolla and Holguín. When

they went to fight the fire, they found the bodies of four missing boys from Báguanos, mutilated but recognizable. After torturing them for a day and half the night, the soldiers shot them – about 1:00 a.m. today, according to the coroner – and left them there. They had their fingernails pulled off. Big chunks of flesh had been cut off in various places. Knives had been shoved into the front of their arms and pulled out the back. Their faces are bruised and swollen. Another thing they'd done before killing the boys was put out their eyes. Each one is also full of bullet holes. And they were naked.

The bodies came in on the rail-car about 1:30 p.m. All Báguanos was waiting downtown – women and children on the sidewalk, men in the street. The men followed the car to the garage, where they cleaned up and dressed the corpses and put them into caskets. I'll never forget seeing the procession leave the garage, headed for the four homes. Two caskets were carried by the men, walking. The one to Onoides Suárez's house was in a pickup. The other, which had to go to Rejondón, was in the company ambulance. Behind each was a huge crowd of men -- in cars, on horseback, or afoot.

I went to Onoides' to be with the wife and children of Terito, Onoides' brother-in-law, when his body arrived. . . . From there I went to Rejondón to try to console Mongo's mother and one sister. The other sister was in another house, completely crazed. In every family there is at least one person who has gone crazy. At one home the neighbors and friends have to hold down the mother and brothers so they won't go to the *cuartel* and, without weapons, attack the guards. Several jeep-loads of soldiers were sent here today to help keep order.

When Hugo's casket arrived at his home, his hands were crossed on his chest. The first thing his mother noticed was the missing fingernails. The bodies are all fixed now so that only the face can be seen. Tonight after church we went to Onoides' again and then to the homes of Roger and Hugo. Tomorrow we have funeral services at 6:00 a.m. for Mongo, 7:00 a.m. for Terito, and 8:00 a.m. for Roger. Hugo was a faithful Catholic and will have a Catholic funeral. When I got home from Rejondón I threw myself across the bed and cried and cried and cried. When I talk with the families I can't cry, because that makes it worse for them instead of better. But I had seen and heard so much that I felt heartbroken.

At least here the families are allowed to bury their dead. In many places the bodies are just shoved into common graves, without identifying them. In Cienfuegos, after a big massacre, people were buried who weren't even dead yet. One soldier went mad because a man he was about to bury begged him not to, and his superior officer, standing nearby, told him to bury the man or he'd be buried alive himself. The four who were killed this week in Marcané, between Cueto and Mayarí, were skinned alive, their hands were cut off, and then they were hanged.

The Baptist minister who is acting as chaplain for Fidel Castro's troops is down from the Sierra temporarily to collect clothes, medicine, and money. The government has offered a \$20,000 reward for him, dead or alive. He's a ministerial student who would have graduated from the Baptist Seminary in Santiago in October if he hadn't left for the Sierra. I know him personally, as he visited us once The Christmas pageant here has been called off. For the past 15 years there's been one. This year no. And the U.S. keeps selling arms to Batista! . . . I must go to bed, but I dread it. Every time I have time to think, I think about all the torture and can hardly stand it.

And from my journal on Monday, December 2nd:

Today's funeral procession was really something. Mongo was buried in Tacámara, but the other three were buried in the cemetery in Báguanos Viejo, all at the same time. Two trucks with flowers went first; then the funeral car with Terito's body; then the priest and two cross-bearers; then the other two funeral cars; then a huge group of women (even though it's customary for only men to go to the burial), on foot. Then the men, on foot and on horseback. Then a line of cars more than a mile long. From our car we could see the entire panorama – a river of people, filling the road for blocks. There couldn't have been fewer than 2,000. Hugo was buried in a concrete grave and covered with bricks and cement. The others had dirt graves. The bodies had all begun to smell terrible before burial time (9:00 a.m.).

January 6, 1958, *Día de Reyes* (Kings' Day, or Epiphany), I received a very special Christmas gift from Donald, one of the youth at the English-speaking church. Donald had been given two ping-pong paddles and gave me one of them. What a remarkable act of generosity! I often played ping-pong with the youth. They had kept a cardboard crown worn by one of the Wise Men in a Christmas pageant, and whoever won a game got to wear it until someone else won. I occasionally got to wear the crown, but usually it was worn by Alberto Williams, who later became a doctor. He traveled to Báguanos in 1995 to be a part of our joint Virginia-Cuba work team, and a few years later we got word of his death.

In April, I was asked by Dr. Stewart, our District Superintendent, to go to Niquero, where the Castro revolution began, to replace the pastor until Annual Conference. That church had been without a pastor for two months, as Rev. Cándido Lucena was in hiding after being accused of aiding the rebels. I did a lot of praying. I wrote in my journal on April 24: "I feel unworthy to do so great a task. What can I do to help people who live in the midst of a cruel civil war? What can I say to those who have lost sons, fathers, husbands? To those whose lives are filled with hate? I can do nothing. Yet if God is pleased to use me, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

I arrived in Niquero on April 26 after telephoning Razziel Vásquez, pastor of the Methodist Church in Santiago de Cuba, to ask for his prayers. Knowing he was praying for me helped me feel more secure, as I considered him one of the finest Christians I knew. In Niquero I stayed in the home of a church family – a mother with eight children. They were poor, and it was a valuable experience to share their lives for a short time and understand more about how Cuban families live. I visited all but two of the church members the day I arrived, as well as the family of a man killed by the rebels. In one home an old seaman made a little speech about his great respect for "America and all the Americans." He went to Miami in his boat at the turn of the century and was impressed with the Americans' honesty, liberty, and willingness to work. He said Cuba would get nowhere with revolutions: the change must be spiritual and moral as well as political.

On April 27, I completed my visits to church families and we had Sunday School at 4:00 and church at 5:00. We could not have activities after dark. Monday morning I went to see the Lieutenant at the army post to ask for the church's jeep, which the army was using. The Lieutenant said it was being "detained" because it had "distributed subversive propaganda." Church members said the previous Lieutenant had been a friend of Pastor Lucena's and was also friendly to the rebels. He asked Lucena to take them a note. Someone found out; the Lieutenant was sentenced to six years in prison and Pastor Lucena had to flee for his life. All of his possessions were still in his house, which no one dared enter. The new Lieutenant asked me where Lucena was, and I was glad I didn't know. He said if I left town to visit the rural churches, I would be arrested. No mission work would be possible! I felt cooped up, but decided to make the best of the situation.

Except for the weekly Sunday School and church services, it appeared my main mission in Niquero would be visiting families to let them know the Methodist Church was still present. As I worked in the church office I had many visitors, as word had spread that I was not allowed to leave town. We decided the rural congregations would hold services in the homes of Niquero church members and have people come into town rather than the pastor go out to them. I continued to lead "house church" services until Annual Conference in June.

Bishop Branscomb had invited a noted Methodist lay evangelist, Harry Denman, to come to Annual Conference. He brought the Spanish words to a new hymn that had become popular in the United States, "How Great Thou Art," and I was asked to sing it and teach it to the annual conference delegates. That year's conference was a difficult one, as we were divided into two groups: those loyal to Batista and those affirming the Castro revolution. Singing that hymn brought us together, and soon it was being sung in Methodist churches all over Cuba.

The last four months of the Revolution – September-December 1958 – were our hardest time. The rebel army had taken over most of the countryside, but Batista's soldiers remained in the cities and towns. The rebels blockaded the roads leading into town; no traffic could enter or leave Báguanos. There was no mail delivery, the company store soon ran out of food and most other merchandise, and even medical supplies were almost depleted because the town's one ambulance driver had been arrested in Holguín, accused of trying to take medical supplies into "rebel territory." He was released the next day (although the medicines were impounded), but by then the rebels had dynamited the highway at La Criolla, so he had to walk home and leave the ambulance there.

My parents, unable to contact me, telephoned GBGM in New York and were told there was no way to contact us and there was nothing they could do. That was not at all reassuring. For a while the rebels occupied Báguanos, but one day about 400 Batista soldiers came, with two tanks, 19 trucks, 6 jeeps, and a bulldozer that made a road for them as they traveled. The rebels had left town to avoid a battle. They knew the army was coming, because five rebels in a jeep had turned onto the highway near Báguanos and found themselves face to face with the entire convoy. They left the jeep running, jumped out, rolled down a hill, vaulted over a fence, and ran so fast the soldiers could not hit them with their bullets. All but one of them lost their pistols as they ran, but the one who was still armed fired back over his shoulder and wounded two soldiers. (I noted in my journal, "It sounds unbelievable, but both the rebels and the soldiers tell the very same story.")

The rebels ran several kilometers to Báguanos, jumped on the horses they found behind our school and rode through town warning everyone. My horse Lucy was taken to the rebel camp where she was well cared for until they returned her to me. By the time the army arrived, everyone was shut up inside their houses. The soldiers prowled through the streets with rifles cocked, and set up machine guns in strategic places. That night 30 of them

slept in the *rancho* beside our house. (The *rancho* was a cement floor with a thatched roof, no side walls – the recreation center for our church youth and often the meeting place for the Larger Parish staff.) They set up a big machine gun, which I nearly tripped over when I went to offer them coffee, after which I was shaking so much I could hardly pour the coffee.

Most of the soldiers left the next day. The 50 who remained stayed in the Club Maceo, a big stucco building. They put sandbags on the roof, dug trenches all around the building, and had sentries stationed there 24 hours a day. Occasionally the rebels would sneak in at night and taunt the soldiers, who would start firing, but the rebels always got away without anyone getting hurt. The soldiers said the rebels were like ghosts – appearing and disappearing, winning battles that should have been impossible to win.

The only means of traveling to our churches was by bicycle or horseback. Virginia and I rode borrowed bicycles the 25 kilometers to Tacajó to lead the church services there. We were sometimes accompanied by the local Catholic priest. We found it amusing that he wore trousers under his cassock – just as we wore slacks under our skirts, as women did not wear slacks in public in Cuba at that time.

In early December, eager to see if we could get our mail at the Holguín post office and in need of money which I could get from a bank if my paychecks had arrived in the mail, I decided to go to Holguín (50 kilometers away) by horseback. Along the way I spent the night with Rev. Antonio Ruiz and his wife Lucía at the parsonage in Alcalá, one of the churches in our Larger Parish, and in Holguín I stayed with Dulce Horschek.

I had a nice surprise in Alcalá – Antonio and Lucía welcomed me with a COLD soft drink. We had no electricity in Báguanos, but they had no electricity at any time so they had a kerosene refrigerator. In Holguín, I was able to get our mail, and I cashed three paychecks – a total of \$300. I had planned a way to hide the money, as I was afraid the rebels, if they saw it, might decide they needed it. I took a girdle with me – not my usual attire for horseback riding – and I put the money, mostly small bills, inside the girdle. However, with the jogging motion of the horse, some of the bills fell to the ground, so I had to stop periodically to gather it up and put it back inside the girdle. I didn't retrieve all of it, as I arrived home three dollars short.

By Christmas, our household, like most others in town, was out of rice and other staples. We did not go hungry; we could buy raw sugar from the sugar mill, and we walked to nearby farms to buy fruits and vegetables, eggs and milk. Each morning I walked to a dairy farm to purchase milk. One day as I came back carrying our two pails of milk, I tripped and fell and spilled all the milk. That day we had to do without our *café con leche* (coffee with milk) and *dulce de leche* (a milk-based dessert). With so little we could buy that Christmas, we decided to make orange marmalade to give as Christmas gifts, since there were plenty of orange trees and sugar was available. As we delivered our gifts, we met many friends on their way to bring us their gifts – orange marmalade!

On Christmas Eve, it was traditional to go to midnight mass (Catholics) or a Christmas Eve service (Methodists) and then have a feast of roast pig stuffed with rice, along with many other good dishes. Since there was a 7:00 p.m. curfew, we had our Christmas Eve service at 5:00. At about 6:00, we answered a knock on our door to find two of the Aguilera children, bringing us a big platter of rice, with slices of roast pork. We knew they had been saving their last package of rice for their Christmas dinner, and that they had one little pig left in their yard, and we were overwhelmed by their sharing their last bit of food with us. Never before had I understood so clearly the true meaning of Christmas. When I returned to Báguanos in 1995, one of those two little boys was by then the husband of the pastor of the church.

The Revolution triumphed on January 1, 1959, when Fidel Castro's troops occupied Havana without opposition after Fulgencio Batista fled to Miami. However, as we listened to the news on the radio that morning, some Cuban Air Force planes whose pilots were fleeing to nearby islands bombed and strafed Báguanos. The center of town was fire-bombed and the outskirts were hit by bullets from planes that dived low, firing machine guns. Some of us had taken refuge in the church, lying under the thick wooden pews, which saved us from the bullets that pierced the church doors and roof. I lay on the floor, reading Scripture passages, and found comfort in Psalm 20:7, "Some trust in their war chariots and others in their horses, but we trust in the power of the Lord our God." For years I could not bear to see war movies; they brought back too many bad memories.

When the rebels came into town, the soldiers came out peacefully and handed over their weapons. The rebel commander gathered the soldiers together, made a speech to them about being loyal to the new government, and told them they were free to return to their homes. After the planes had left, I returned to the house and found that a bullet had gone through the mattress on my bed. I was glad I had gone to the church for refuge. Amazingly, the only injury in the entire town was that one young man was shot in the leg. I took him to the local clinic in Carolina (our van).

After Fidel Castro entered Havana, there was great rejoicing and an atmosphere of hope and expectancy. There were military tribunals and some of Batista's officers were executed, but even the missionary community viewed those as necessary steps toward having a democracy once again. Unfortunately, the United States government refused to recognize the Castro regime, and Castro turned to Russia, which gleefully welcomed Cuba into the Communist fold.

That month I received a letter from Paco Mesa, a friend from the 1955 caravan training center. I treasure it for his concern for me and also for his creative use of the English language. It said: "How are you? How are the roof of your house after the airplane passed over it? . . . Angelita wrote me and told me about her brother who was herido [wounded] by a bullet. Did in some other house of the church happened something? . . . Another thing that here I heard something about you walking toward Holguín in your horse when the situation wasn't good. Can you arrived Holguín? . . . Here the only thing we had is that the night of Noche Buena [Christmas Eve], about seven o'clock, someone soltó una bola [started a rumor] that rebels were around Cienfuegos. This was a terrible because in any house we can't had special dinner."

During the summer of 1959, I became engaged to Ceferino Pavón, who had graduated from the *Colegio de la Amistad* and had been the star pitcher on the school's baseball team, of which I was the coach(!) and for which several of the team members' mothers and I had sewn white uniforms with green trim. The team consisted of students from 4th through 8th grades, and there were no age limits for private school teams. We won almost all of our games, for three reasons. First, our smallest player was very fast. He would double himself up so there was almost no strike zone, get to first base on balls, then steal the other bases to score a run. Second, our oldest player – Ceferino – could pitch fastballs which very few batters could hit. Third, I knew very little about baseball, so I studied the rulebook and often contested an umpire's decision. I would show him in the rulebook why his call was wrong, and he would reverse the decision to our advantage.

When we became engaged, Ceferino was 19 and I was 25 – about the same age difference as my parents, so I didn't consider it a bad match. However, he joined the Cuban army after the revolution, and by the time I went home to Texas he had been sent to Moscow to study under the Russian army. Our relationship did not last long after that.

When I left Cuba at the end of 1959, many upper-class Cubans had fled to the USA after their properties had been confiscated, and relations between our countries had become strained. By mid-1960 almost all the Cuban pastors had left, and in the fall of that year the missionaries were recalled, with two exceptions: Sara Fernández, a Mexican-American from Texas, remained until time for her retirement, and Dr. Richard Milk and his wife Juliet stayed on for another year at the request of the Cuban government, which valued his expertise in agriculture and needed his help as they took over the Agricultural School.

Since I intended to return to Cuba, I left most of my belongings there. After Castro declared a communist regime and missionaries were no longer allowed in Cuba, I asked my friends to distribute my possessions – including my beloved horse Lucy -- to whoever could use them. I had already given my trumpet to Roy Rodríguez, who had learned to play it to accompany hymns in the mission churches.

Years later one friend told me she had used a sermon outline I left, based on the song "The Lord Knows the Way through the Wilderness." Another friend, Geóbel González, a retired lawyer in Havana, told me that he had left the church for many years, but one day as he listened to my 45-rpm record of Tennessee Ernie Ford's song, "Have I Been Away Too Long?" he decided it was time for him to once again become active in the Methodist Church.

A summary of my work in Cuba, written many years later in response to a questionnaire sent to retired missionaries, reads as follows:

"Question: Did you serve as a pastor, educator, medical, etc.?"

"Answer: Yes."