

the Heights

LE MOYNE COLLEGE
SUMMER/FALL 1980



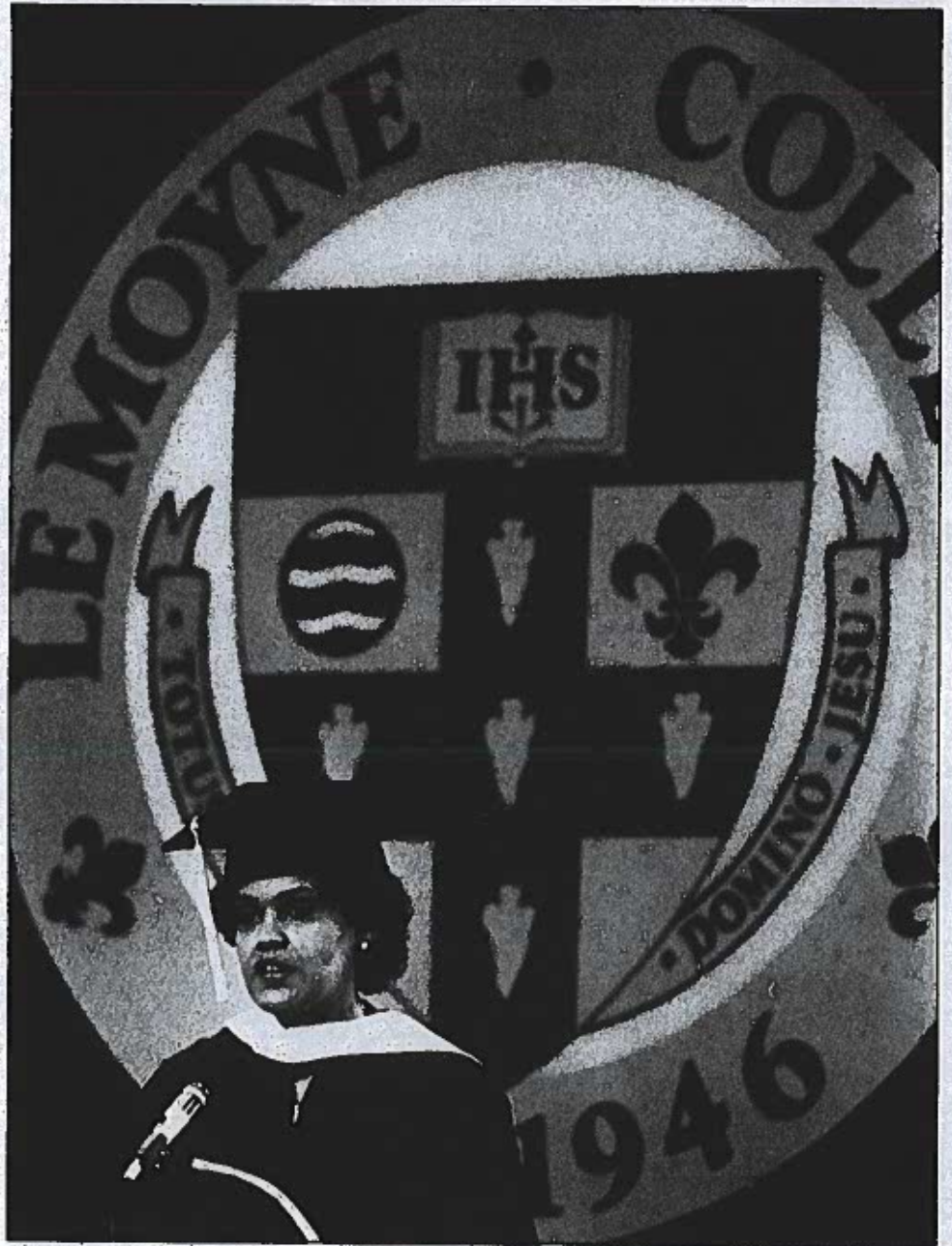
**SCIENCE AND
THE HEART**



**THE BAY OF
MARIEL**



**THE
STATES UNITED**



STANDING TOGETHER

ANOTHER FIRST—PAGE 24

A JOURNAL FROM THE BAY OF MARIEL

BY RAQUEL ROMEU

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Raquel Romeu, associate professor of modern languages at Le Moyne, kept a lengthy journal of her harrowing trip to Cuba to claim her brother, Jorge Luis Romeu, and his family.

Prof. Romeu herself was able to leave Cuba in 1969, and has worked to get other family members out ever since. Her mother lives with her in Syracuse, and her nephew, Manuel, is a Le Moyne senior. Prof. Romeu is helping her brother and his wife and three children establish new lives here.

The following are excerpts from Prof. Romeu's journal, which she plans to publish.



PHOTO: FRANK SHOEMAKER

SUNDAY, APRIL 27

It rains. The storm is over and there is nothing to do. I've decided to start this journal to kill time and . . . so that I will never forget any of this.

I. and M. just climbed down to the engine room to take a shower. It's a steep stepladder, and everything down there is greasy and hot. A bucket of water and a picnic thermos hanging by a rope to a pipe overhead are our bathing facilities. Our captain, after the hour-long effort of avoiding other boats in the overcrowded bay, is relaxing and comparing notes with our next-door neighbor—another shrimp trawler captain—while drinking beer. T. and N. are playing cards with a soiled and much-used deck they found on board. A. sits in the only chair on the *Fern Elinore*—the pilot's chair—and worries because the immigration authorities haven't been around to our boat to pick up our papers with the list of relatives we propose to claim. We have appointed her guardian of those precious sheets of paper. C. is the oldest person on board. She has come to claim her children and grandchildren. She's a very gutsy lady. I don't think she trusted any of us at first, but she's beginning to relax. E. is eating yogurt. We have each brought enough food for at least one week, plus enough to feed the people they will put on board. The captain says we have sufficient water, too. Both tanks are full, and these trawlers usually stay at sea as many as 20 days at a time. Also, each of us brought two two-gallon containers of drinking water, and the shrimp storage compartment is full of ice.

We are eight plus the captain, and we are tied alongside the *Miss So Nicey* inside the bay of Mariel, Cuba. I have never seen so many boats together. Last night I could see 48 shrimp trawlers and at least twice as many smaller craft, some less than 19 feet long. I don't know how they were able to make it across the Straight with that strong Gulf current and the winds. A huge catamaran named *America*, said to hold 350 people, came in last night. It's probably the largest boat in the bay, next to the shrimp trawlers.

This morning we watched about 20 more shrimp trawlers sail in, along with many smaller boats.

All this started last Tuesday afternoon for me. A call from Miami alerted me that boats were leaving for Cuba from Key West because Fidel Castro had opened the port of Mariel to those who wished to go and fetch their relatives.

My cousin in Key West wanted my consent to initiate negotiations with a boat to try and claim my brother in Cuba.

My kid brother, Jorge Luis, who is 34 years old, had tried to get out of Cuba for years. He did his two years of military service in a labor camp cutting cane. Not being "integrated into the revolution," and having a passport that indicated his desire to leave the country, Jorge didn't qualify for military service as such, but he did qualify for the cane fields of Camaguey. Afterward, he went back to school. He became a mathematician, got married and had three children.

Four years ago I had doubled my efforts to get my family out of Cuba. My other brother was finally out of prison, after serving nearly 13 years for the political crime of being "against the powers of the state." A year ago last January he and my mother managed to leave Cuba. Jorge was still there. For the past year, he and his family had had visas to Colombia and Venezuela, and residents' visas to the United States, and their passage out of Cuba in U.S. dollars deposited at the Banco Nacional de Cuba. But the harassment, the waiting, the war of nerves had continued for them.

This past winter, I found out through a relative that Jorge had been imprisoned and interrogated for two days last summer at the Cuban Repression Bureau. His home had been searched thoroughly, with the excuse that he was thought to possess U.S. dollars, a crime punishable by imprisonment, even if just one miserable one-dollar bill is found.

What they did find was a list of the titles of short stories he had written and sent to me, and a typed copy of the little book of short stories I had had printed years before for him under a pseudonym.

Jorge convinced his interrogators

that he was just an unimportant person who wrote stories, but that if they imprisoned him they would make him a hero, a writer forced into silence. They released him with a suspended sentence. He then instructed me to guard the stories with my life and not to publish anything more of his under his name or any other, unless I heard he was imprisoned again.

When my cousin asked if I would give my consent to have someone go and get my brother, I felt this was *it*—our big chance.

That night the *Syracuse Herald-Journal* had a brief account of the first boat from Cuba returning to Key West. It brought mainly people who had taken refuge in the Peruvian Embassy "and some other persons who have relatives in the United States."

I called Key West again. My cousin said it was chaos there. Cubans were pouring in from all parts of the United States with money to buy their passage to Cuba, or with trailers dragging boats. Everyone seemed to want to go over. I decided to wait until Wednesday morning, and in the meantime I spent all night trying to call Havana. I felt it was up to Jorge to decide whether he wanted to be part of this madness, and whether he was willing to risk the lives of his little ones crossing over in one of those boats.

At 6:45 a.m., I got a call from the Keys. A boat had just arrived with 200 people, but three were wounded. They had been attacked in the streets of Havana as they left their homes to embark at the port of Mariel. It was dangerous, risky at least.

The telephone lines were closed between Cuba and the United States. I decided to try going through a third country. Within the hour someone had reached Jorge, and his reply was: "Come and get us, yes, by all means. I don't care if it is in a bathtub."

I began to make plans to leave. I knew that if I didn't go myself, nothing would be accomplished. Everyone at Le Moyne College was very cooperative and sympathetic.

I made plane reservations. When I called Key West again, I was told, "Bring down \$6,000."

Six thousand dollars! Where would I get that sum? I began making phone calls: my relatives, a friend who had

offered to help weeks ago when all this was still a rumor.

On Thursday, April 24, I left Syracuse. I arrived in Miami with only 20 minutes to change planes. A friend and my uncle were waiting for me. Each handed me an envelope with money. It was like a gangster movie. I stuck the envelopes in my purse, which held all the money I had pulled out of my savings account that same morning. Everyone had contributed what he or she could. I had a total of \$3,100—not anywhere near the \$6,000 I was told I would need. As I would soon learn, many had even less, although some had considerably more.

Key West was overflowing with people. The streets were full of Cubans referred to other Cubans by someone in his or her home town.

I tried to call my cousin. The line was busy, so I gave the phone to a man whose wife was dragging a life jacket wrapped in a plastic bag. He dialed a number written on a piece of scrap paper and spoke: "Hello! I'm so and so, Quico's friend. I'm at the airport. We have just arrived. Quico said you could help us find a boat." Everyone thought it would be easy: get there; jump on a boat; arrive in Mariel a few hours later; your relatives would be handed to you in just a day or two. Throw in a few embassy people, why not? One good turn deserved another. You'd be back at work by Monday.

My cousin and I spent all evening, until midnight, trying to close a deal for a tugboat. We finally found one that would cost \$2,100 per person. It would be leaving Key West the next day.

Early the next morning, someone went to look at the tugboat. He reported back to us that it would be dangerous to sail with the number of people they were planning to cram on board.

I went to see it myself. I was so eager to go that I didn't care what the boat looked like, as long as it would hold together. It appeared to be solid, although it was made of wood. It was in dry dock, and they were going to put it in the water that afternoon. I didn't like the sound of that. How would we know whether or not it leaked? Also, it was very small.

Later that morning, we were told that

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14 a shrimp trawler was available—for a \$20,000 rental fee. I joined forces with seven others. Together, we hoped to claim 42 relatives. The trawler could hold 200 or more people, so even if the Cuban government added four people for each of our relatives, as it was rumored they might, we had a good chance of bringing everyone back. The \$2,500 per person was paid gladly.

With throbbing hearts we boarded the *Fern Elinore*. We sailed at 6 p.m. that Friday. The sea looked calm and beautiful. It was still daylight. William, the captain of the 73-foot-boat, was the classic vagabond. Long blond hair tied in a pony tail, blond beard, tall, very slim, in his early 30s. His baggage: a guitar.

We were exhausted, mostly from tension, and each of us sought a spot in which to retire. It wasn't easy, because the cabin was so small. It was divided into four compartments: the captain's command post and his quarters, with one bunk and storage space; the "kitchen," with one four-burner gas stove, a sink with a pump faucet and a pullman table with two benches, and behind that, with no door, the "bedroom," consisting of four bunks.

I climbed into one of the upper bunks. The window was open. Night began to fall. As we approached the Florida Straight, the winds became stronger and the waves grew higher and higher.

The sun went down. The sea got rougher. The chains and irons on board clanged frightfully. The captain ran from one side to the other, trying to keep the boat as steady as possible, and then to the rudder to adjust our course.

I couldn't move. The waves kept increasing in size and force. Water began showering in through the open window. I was soaked. I reached for my raincoat and threw it over me. Spending a night all wet was the least of my worries.

I dozed off and was rudely awakened by a terrific bang and the boat keeling over. William got N. out of bed and put him to work. He couldn't handle it alone. One stabilizer was tangled and had to be cut loose.

Later, things seemed to quiet down, and the next thing I knew it was daybreak and we were in Cuban waters. I stepped on deck. The sea was calm. N. greeted me. Rather than saying "good morning," he cried, "land! land!" I could

see something on the horizon.

When we could orient ourselves, we saw we were indeed headed for the bay of Mariel. We had made it in just 12 hours in spite of the weather, and we had hit it right on the nose. Many others had ended up near Havana and further east!

The number of boats waiting for permission to enter the bay was staggering. There were all sizes, all kinds, even some outboard motor craft. They all carried more people than they should and they were expecting to take even more back. Many were to be very disappointed.

We drifted for a while, not knowing where to go or what to do. Finally the CB informed us that we had to go to the end of the line and wait, tying ourselves, like all the other boats, bow to stern. William protested. He thought that was crazy. A shrimp trawler like ours could easily crush a smaller craft. But he joined the line and we waited.

Suddenly we saw a trawler breaking away from the line. We began yelling at them to find out if there was another line for the bigger boats. They yelled back that we had to go to the entrance of the bay, where the Cuban coast guard was, to get a form to fill out.

Once inside the port, we were ordered to moor side by side, tied to each other. We had already anchored when we were told to move further along. In the rush, we lost our anchor. The amount of scrap iron in anchors that the Cuban government is going to collect from the bottom of Mariel Bay is going to be considerable!

At the end of the day our neighbors from the *Miss So Nicey* saw an immigration authority boat approaching. One of them shouted, "When are we leaving?" That triggered the acid reply: "We don't want you here, and we are trying our best to get you out as soon as possible." The hatred in the official's voice was clear. Suddenly, I remembered all those years visiting one brother in political prisons, the other brother in labor camps . . . and my own seven months on a farm doing hard labor just before I left Cuba. It frightened me more than the rough sea we had encountered the night before.

MONDAY, APRIL 28

The sun has disappeared. Black clouds have filled the sky and heavy rain and furious high winds have begun to toss about the hundreds of boats tied to one another. The shrimp trawlers are anchored in a separate area from the smaller craft, but last night they ordered new arrivals, no matter how small, to tie themselves to the shrimp boats. Many boats have lost their anchors, and they have to depend on another boat's anchor. Earlier our captain said that it would be a catastrophe if the winds rose to 10 miles per hour. We are now getting winds of 100 miles per hour!

We can't see a thing, but we can hear the boats banging against each other. William is running from side to side, cursing, pulling levers, getting us away from all the other boats and trying to keep the *Fern Elinore* stable while avoiding a collision. He runs to the bow, then to the stern. "Everyone inside and out of the way," he yells. "we're leaving." A trawler is a solid boat, but very clumsy. Loaded down with many iron gadgets, it maneuvers slowly and painfully. Backing up a little, going forward a little, he gets us out of that confusion of ships.

A typical tropical storm, it all stops as suddenly as it started. We make our way back to the *Miss So Nicey* from the far end of the bay where we had taken refuge. On the way we discover an incredible number of smaller craft anchored among the little islets.

I slept on deck last night. The captain made mattresses out of shrimp nets. E. and I slept near the bow. William and N. slept in the stern. His bunk is being occupied by I. and M., the only couple on board. Life preservers are our pillows.

Many people from other boats have gone ashore. They are being taken to the Hotel Triton in Havana, for \$32 a night. The boat that takes them ashore costs \$5 and the bus, \$15.

MONDAY AFTERNOON

We are facing the Naval Academy with its castle on a hill and its steep steps. Over the red-tiled Spanish roofs of the little town of Mariel, I recognize the old church with its one bell tower,

and I remember a famous seafood restaurant that was nearby. When I was a child my father used to take us there for Sunday dinner. It was one of the most popular restaurants, just half an hour from Havana.

On our left, at the entrance to the harbor, is the cement factory. Next to it is the power plant. On our right, and further inland, are the two chimneys of the San Ramon sugarmill. They remind me of the smell of molasses, the soot, and my happy Easters spent in a sugarmill town. The palm trees are silhouetted against the blue sky. This morning I heard the roosters sing at dawn. How near and how far from Cuba we are! I have been thinking of Jose Maria Heredia, expatriated like us, sitting on a ship anchored along the Cuban shore, longing, but unable, to set foot on the land he loved so much. He wrote the beautiful "Song of the Expatriate," which I must read again when I get home.

TUESDAY, APRIL 29

I slept on deck as usual last night. It was cold and damp. To kill time we have washed the deck. William hung the nets up and put all the irons, planks and chains in their places. They have sent a flyer around saying we will be here for more than a month, and that any boat that wants to leave now, without any Cubans, may do so.

M. has gone into Havana. From the Hotel Triton he'll be able to call our relatives here and in the United States, to let them know we have arrived safely. There have been many accidents. Our relatives here must remain in their homes. If immigration officials go for them and they are not home, they will miss their opportunity. There are all kinds of rumors about how long we'll have to wait and how many relatives, and whom, we shall be allowed to claim.

It's late. E., T. and I are going to sleep on deck. We will try some long pieces of styrofoam and see if they make better beds than the deck. I put my sweater on and cover myself with my Le Moyne windbreaker and my raincoat. Then I get between the fishing nets. I look like Big Bird in "Sesame Street."

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30

Last night our preparations to go to bed were interrupted by William's return. Our captain had been "tasting" the Cuban rum and beer. He fell in the water when he tried to jump from one boat to the other, hitting his cheekbone so hard he almost passed out. He had trouble coming up to the surface. He's got a black eye and quite a bruise on his cheek.

We have waited for the immigration people all day again. The radio from Key West said 800 refugees had arrived today and they were expecting 100 more. There are almost 2,000 boats here by my estimate. We've seen some movement at last. When William went to the dock he saw about five large boats being loaded.

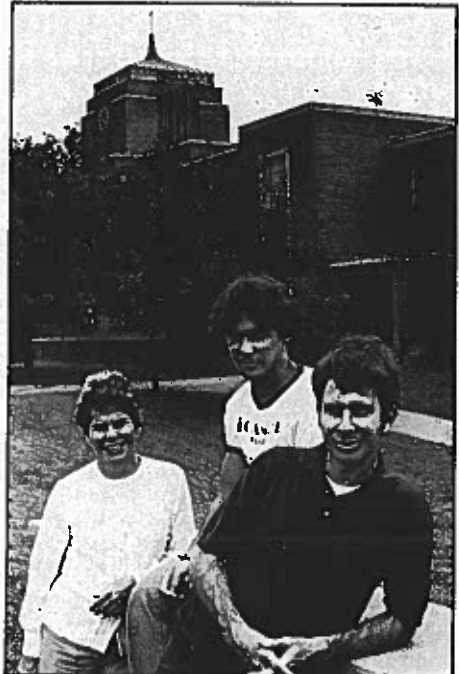
Many small craft are going back empty. Some say they can't wait any longer. They have been here up to eight days, and have run out of food, water and money. The Cuban government is still finding food and water to sell to us.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Rumors are driving us crazy. Some say you must go to Havana to hand in the lists of the relatives to be claimed. Yesterday we heard over the CB radio that we should remain on our boats and wait for the immigration authorities; that there were some 700 persons left in the Peruvian Embassy in Havana; that any boats seized or damaged would be returned to their owners, and that gas, water and food would be available for purchase.

Today is our sixth day waiting for the immigration authorities. We have decided to go ashore and call our relatives. I had vowed I wouldn't set foot on Cuban soil, but now I have made up my mind to go. I feel moved, frightened and, above all, very sad as we approach land. I had thought I would steal a handful of Cuban soil to take back with me. But when I step on it, it is dirty, trodden upon, hard and barren.

The first thing that hits me is the terrible odor from the improvised latrines. The dock is filled with people with different problems. Most of them have had boat trouble. In the sun, at an improvised table, two immigration



A Romeu reunion at Le Moyne (left to right): Raquel Romeu, her nephew, Manuel, and her brother Jorge Luis.

officials write down claims of all sorts. People wait patiently in line. Later we were told the two officials disappeared at 11:30 a.m., saying they were going to lunch, and never came back. The people waited until 5 or 6 p.m., to no avail.

We take a taxi to the cafeteria, which is only two minutes away. We are not allowed to walk around. The taxi costs \$2 per person. The cafeteria is watched at all four corners by people in uniform or people with arm bands showing they belong to surveillance committees.

One of our group recognized a neighbor who had gone outside to hang her clothes on the line. Discreetly he waved his hand a little; she put her hand in the middle of her chest, holding it very close, and answered him with the same gesture. A young boy recognized a boy from Mariel who apparently worked in the cafeteria. "There's my cousin!" he cried. The older man accompanying him cautioned him not to talk to him.

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"Don't. You'll bring trouble for him." The boy couldn't understand.

"Why? He's my cousin." And he moved toward him, excited. The boy from Mariel recognized them, opened his eyes wide, and kept shaking his head slightly no, no! He dove into the first open door he saw to avoid meeting his cousin. Someone noticed. Immediately, two officials materialized. The elderly man said, "Leave him alone, son. You'll only bring him grief." They stood there, their eyes full of tears.

Everything is expensive. Fried chicken costs \$12.50, steak \$15. I figure that if there are 2,000 boats here, with an average of 10 people per boat who are spending \$100 each, they have taken in \$2 million at least. If one were to include the cost of water, gas, provisions, mechanical parts and port taxes, I'd say they've harvested \$4 million in one week.

When I talked to my brother over the phone, Jorge said, "Oh, sister, to think you've risked coming here just to get us out!" I felt terrible trying to explain to him that our lists hadn't been collected yet and that there was much confusion as to how many people each of us could claim. I told him my idea: I would claim all five if I were allowed to. If allowed four I would leave the youngest child out; if three, the second; if two I would leave all three children out; if one, I would only claim him. I told him: "You have your papers in order, you have your visas and the U.S. dollars for the plane tickets, and you're leaving a two-family house. Push from your end. I'm sure they'll let the whole family go." He told me that his papers were being retained by an immigration official, and that just today he had been in their office. He was relieved to know I was all right. Nobody knew anything on his end, either. All they heard were rumors. He agreed to all my suggestions.

When I returned to the boat and told M. about my conversation, he thought I had done the wrong thing. "You must let them decide," he said. "You can't assume they will all be able to leave. These people are not kidding. They will split up the family." I can't believe that could happen. God can't let it happen. I've asked M. to call and tell Jorge to make the decision himself.

FRIDAY, MAY 2

M. and two others have just returned from Havana. It was a useless trip. They had been given the number 1083 for their interview with the immigration authorities, but that afternoon only numbers in the 20s and 30s were being handled. I asked M. if he had called Jorge. Yes, he said, my brother's instructions were that if I only could claim two, to claim him and his asthmatic son; if just one, my brother. I felt a chill. For the first time I admitted to myself that the family might have to be split up. But what really frightened me was his message that he was ready to leave his family behind. I knew things had to be very bad for him to make such a decision.

I'm not a pessimist. No one here is, thank God. M. and N. have left again for shore, to see if they can get the immigration interview. They say there is another office on the dock. We are hoping they'll find out something. This is keeping us in constant tension. We don't know how many each can claim, and we calculate and speculate according to what others have told us, but nothing is certain. We hear that people are being brought to the dock on buses. One man managed to ask them where they were coming from. A girl answered, "From the embassy." "How come you look so neat?" he asked. "They allowed us to go home, take a shower and change," she replied. The guard came over and told the man to stay away from the buses. He peeked in the next bus and a man told him that yes, they were from the embassy, but they had arrived the day before. Strange. No one has entered the Peruvian Embassy since the guard was reinstated, according to the press.

We hear that 8,000 refugees have already arrived in Florida.

We have found a box of dehydrated mashed potatoes. We are making a tuna-potato pie when M. and N. return with the good news that they have seen the immigration people, have given them our boat's data and that now we must wait for the authorities to visit us here.

It's raining, as it usually does at this time of year. It is the first rain of May and we have all gotten wet . . . for luck.

We have put every container we could find out on deck, and have collected a lot of water. Tomorrow we can all take showers.

M. decided to make a great big sign. He and N. have hoisted the sign high on the stern. It reads: "Nine days without a contract." The immigration authorities call the deal they make with the boats a contract; they give us a certain number of people they want to send out and we take a certain number of relatives.

It has stopped raining, and there is a beautiful double rainbow toward land. It encircles the lovely hills behind Mariel. That, too, is supposed to be lucky. Let's see if immigration visits us tomorrow. The lists are ready on the table. Holding them down is a metal statuette of St. Anne de Beaupres. N. has a picture of Our Lady of Charity. E., of St. Martha. Beside the St. Anne I have placed a Sacred Heart of Jesus. Secretly we have all been praying every day. The longer we wait, the more we pray. Finally, today, when I brought out the St. Anne and put it on the papers, each one brought out his or her private saint and nailed it over the door or over the window.

The captains and crew of the next two boats are friends of William. They have been drinking rum all day. William is very drunk and he's still drinking.

SATURDAY, MAY 3

It was about 1 a.m. when the nightmare began. We were all asleep. Suddenly William appeared, screaming, "I'm going to kill him!" and searching for a gun. Apparently the other two captains, who are brothers, had had a fight. They were all very drunk. M. tried to calm William down. Very sternly M. said: "Look, if just one shot is fired, they will come and throw you in jail and you'll rot there forever. You don't know Fidel Castro." William embraced M. and almost wept. Then he went back to his chant: "I'm going to kill him." He walked out on deck and I followed him. Because he could communicate well with me in English we had had long talks, and he seemed to like me. I pleaded with him. "Please, William, I beg you. Leave it alone. Go to bed. Don't drink anymore." He answered, "All right. I'm going to throw the gun overboard. I won't do anything

... but I want more rum."

We went back to bed pretty shaken. We were all sleeping inside. A while later, he stumbled into the kitchen, looking for ice. In his hand was the Gatorade bottle he was using as a glass, full of rum. He was beside himself and quite incoherent. His tone went from rage to meekness and back to rage. He loved us—he hated us. He left, but shortly afterward he was on deck pacing from bow to stern. We were all in the kitchen, and as he passed the window he would stick his head in and hurl insults at us. He kept repeating: "I love America. These Cubans don't love America!" He put his head in the window. "Say you love America as much as I do." I said, "I'm an American citizen, William, and I love America." That infuriated him even more. He slammed the window shut, then put his fist through it and put his head in. He paced again, yelling obscenities.

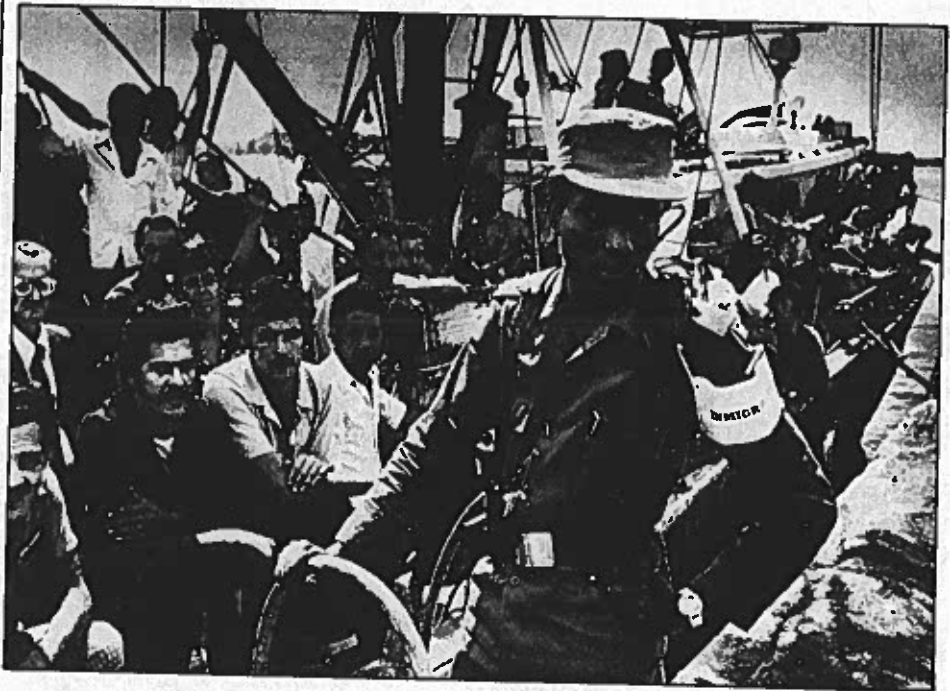
Besides our fear of him, we were afraid the Cuban authorities might be there any minute. Every night, two or three searchlights scanned the sea, the boats and the sky, and coast guard boats cruised the area constantly.

William said, "I'm leaving," and with that he went to the captain's post and started the motors. M. and I followed him. "Don't, William, you are a good man," I said. Complete change in him. "You know it," he said, and shut the motors off. Then he went outside and yelled and paced for the next two hours. The obscenities were directed at us. It was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

We sat in the kitchen, shaking. A. passed Valium around. As William quieted down, we tried to sleep.

This morning we are up early. William is asleep in the anchor box, on top of the ropes. He looks like a corpse. At noon we decide E. and I should go ashore to complain again about the immigration authorities' delay, and also, to call Key West and let our relatives know what happened last night. We are afraid things are getting out of hand.

When we return to the boat, M. decides we need something more than just the sign to call the attention of the immigration authorities' tiny boats. E. cuts two strips from a red blanket—the only one we have on board—and now we wave them and make desperate



gestures every time we spot an immigration boat.

SUNDAY, MAY 4

We have been waving our red strips at every immigration boat without success. Finally, a Mariel pilot boat visited us this afternoon. We were delirious when the official came aboard. All he wanted was money, but we gave it to him gladly. It was the first positive step, and we hoped that now the spell was broken. He charged us \$180 port fee. N. paid. In the receipt he put down that we had entered the port on April 26. As he was leaving an immigration boat came by and he called it. He explained our case to the captain, who promised to look into it.

At midnight, M. and W. return from a visit to the *Comandante Pinares*. They

have been informed that the reason no immigration authorities have visited us so far is that our first form, filled out outside the bay, has been lost. They can't process us.

MONDAY, MAY 5

With the disheartening news brought by M. we are all in very low spirits. I've been crying and praying. I'm oppressed by two persisting worries: that I may not get my family out, and may be forced to abandon the people I love, and my inability to communicate directly with my family in the United States.

We continue to hail every immigration boat that goes by. This morning one stopped, and three officials came aboard. They looked through their

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COURTESY OF UPI

28 lists. We weren't on any list. They told us not to go to Havana, but to move to the entrance of the bay, where they are taking care of boats with problems. Instantly William started the motors and we sailed toward the entrance.

In the afternoon we called to another immigration boat going by. An official came aboard and made us fill out another form, one that we hadn't even heard of.

On this side of the bay there is a lot going on. We are surrounded by very young soldiers with rifles. I think there is one behind each pine tree and under every rock. The searchlights scan the sea as of sundown. We wonder how many might have tried to swim to one of the boats in the bay. We have heard of a couple of young cadets being caught swimming out toward a boat.

TUESDAY, MAY 6

I ache all over from sleeping on the floor on top of the nets. It's always cold and very damp in the wee hours.

From this new position we can see all that's going on. We have regained our enthusiasm. We continue to call out to every immigration boat that comes within hearing distance. They keep telling us our boat is not on their lists. E. has suggested we call the "talking boat"—a large craft with a loudspeaker that cruises the area giving orders. There we go again, explaining how long we have been here and that our first form seems to be lost. They suggest we fill out a new one and hand us one. So we do.

On the latest forms we have filled out, we have chosen contract A. There are three types of contracts: A, according to which you wait for the relatives and you take them back with you; B, you take part of the family and they send the rest in another boat; C, you take what they give you and the relatives will be sent afterward on other boats. The boat that leaves empty breaks the contract and there is no deal anymore. We knew choosing A would mean a longer wait, but we had heard of too many cases where they hadn't kept their end of the bargain. Each of us is able to claim five. How relieved I am. That is my brother's entire family.

We go ashore. I call Jorge's house and my sister-in-law answers. My brother is not home. I tell her happily that I am

able to claim them all. She replies: "Now listen to me and don't get excited. This immigration official came by yesterday and returned our passports to us. He said he knew there was a boat waiting for us in the Mariel Bay, but that we could not leave by boat. 'Do you understand,' he said, 'not by way of Mariel, you have to leave by plane.'" They were told to buy their tickets from the Mexican airlines and that their seats would be confirmed Thursday. I don't trust the authorities. I tell my sister-in-law, "You listen to me, now. You tell Jorge that I'm not leaving here until you have left the airport or until I bring you back with me. You tell him that I don't care what that man said. If they come for you to go to the boats, you go. Whatever comes first. I came here for you and I'm not leaving without you. I'm coming ashore Thursday again to know if your seats on the plane have been confirmed."

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7

The immigration captain to whom the port pilot talked has found us, and he has the form that we filled out a couple of days ago. We are told we can claim 61 relatives. They will load the boat with 205 additional people. So we can add people to our original list. I add my sister-in-law's two brothers and a friend of Jorge's who I know is desperate to leave.

THURSDAY, MAY 8

All last night they were calling boats to the loading dock. I could hear them clearly. They would call six or seven at a time. Then they would instruct those already loaded to sail to the entrance of the bay. The coast guard there has to give them the signal to set out to sea.

My conversation with my brother is very short. I tell him I am able to claim his wife's two brothers and that they should remain at home till the officials come for them. I also explain I have claimed his friend. He tells me their tickets for the Sunday flight to Merida have been bought. I promise to call back on Monday to make sure they have been able to leave. I won't try to leave before they do.

FRIDAY, MAY 9

At dawn we all run from bow to stern to watch the loaded boats as they sail off. William says we're going to have strong southwest tradewinds. He hasn't been wrong so far. E., M. and N. go ashore to call their relatives. I doubt that the authorities will be going for the people on our lists this soon. That immigration captain was here only two days ago.

E. is the first one back. They haven't gone for her brother and sister yet. But she has good news for me. She called my sister-in-law and learned that their seats for Sunday are confirmed. They leave Sunday at 11 p.m. What irony! I have come here to get them out and now they are being flown out, and I am stuck, who knows till when.

SATURDAY, MAY 10

Today we have been here 15 days. Luckily we get discouraged by turns.

We were sleeping outside last night and around midnight, a rainstorm hit us and we had to run inside. It's impossible to sleep sitting on a bench with one's head on a table, even if one has a life preserver for a pillow. It was so hot in there. As soon as the rain stopped we came out. We lifted the nets, and the deck underneath was dry, so we slept the rest of the night on the bare boards.

SUNDAY, MAY 11

Today is Mother's Day. I spent a sleepless night. It was terribly humid.

We hear that the boats that have been here more than 15 days should inquire at the *Comandante Pinares* to find out what is causing the delay. M. and I. go. They will also go ashore to call their relatives to see if the immigration people have come for anyone.

N. is wearing the communal shorts so that he can wash his pants. E. found them in a drawer. Since we didn't expect to stay this long, nobody brought many clothes. I have worn the shorts twice so I could wash my slacks. The only extra clothes I have are another blouse and the underwear that I change and wash every time I can take a shower. I have no towel; I use the blouse



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I'm taking off.

MONDAY, MAY 12

I couldn't sleep again last night. All I could think of was: Have they left? Has my brother left? I even scanned the sky from 11 p.m. on in the hope of seeing a plane going northwest. Silly me, planes going to Merida must take off from the Rancho Royer Airport and head straight out to the sea.

I got up at daybreak and took the first boat that would take me ashore.

I call Jorge's house. A woman answers the phone. "Nobody by that name lives here," she says. That's it. They are gone. Somebody else is already installed in the house my father built, but that is not important. What matters is that they have finally left Cuba. I have to be sure. I ask the operator to call another number: my old aunt's house. When she answers the phone I

break down and cry. "Dear aunt, to think I have been sitting on that boat, 20 kilometers away, and haven't been able to see them!" She tells me they left at 10 o'clock the night before.

The rest happens as in a dream. My heart is not there anymore. I return to the boat to find that William has decided he must have more money if we want to stay longer.

Everyone puts together what money he or she has left. Some of us have none. William says he doesn't want our money. He wants the owner of the ship to pay him. We strike a bargain. I want to go back, and E. and I. say they will come with me. William will take the money as a guarantee. We will look up the owner and tell him what William wants: half again of the money we originally paid for renting the boat. The others are sad that we are leaving, but they encourage us to go back. It is like breaking up a family.

We hail the first boat passing by. We land at Pier No. 3. They have just loaded two shrimp trawlers like ours. We ask about the procedure. They give us, again, a form to fill out and tell us to wait in line.

By 3 p.m. we are sailing to the entrance of the harbor. The coast guard holds us there. By sundown we are still there. They tell us the weather in the Gulf isn't good.

There are between 100 and 150 people aboard. One can hardly walk on the deck.

TUESDAY, MAY 13

They let us go at noon.

The coast of Cuba seems far in the distance already. I go back to look at it for the last time, and begin to cry. It's sad to know you can never go home. An old black man sitting quietly beside his daughter and grandson says, "It is very sad to leave one's homeland. All we want is a place to live and work in peace."

In midocean, we spot the American Coast Guard: "U.S. COAST GUARD" in huge beautiful letters. The captain is hauling a line. I ask him if we are in American waters, pointing at the ship. He raises his head, nods, shakes my hand and we begin to jump like a couple of kids.