

Fidel's Socialist Roots

Fidel and Raul grew up on a large farm in Holguin province. Angel Castro, their father was a young Spanish soldier when he first arrived in Cuba. Once discharged from the army back in Spain he returned to Cuba. He first started cutting trees as a logging contractor. He became very close friends with another man named Fidel Pino and one day Angel Castro's first son would be named "Fidel" after him.

Angel Castro had saved some money and was loaned some money by his friend Fidel so that he could buy land at an auction. Angel began to log and grow sugar cane. As long as he was making money he continued to buy and clear more land. Over the years he managed to buy 1,000 hectares. As well as sugar, he was crop farming the land with assorted vegetables, raising cattle, pigs and chickens while still exporting wood.

The mother of the Castro children was Lena Ruez Gonzales, who was born in Finale de Rios Province, the Western most part of Cuba. Her family were very poor peasants. The family arrived at Biran farm looking for work. Angel hired them. Angel and the daughter Lena fell in love here and were married and had seven children, starting with Fidel and Raul.

Over the years, the Castro parents built a small town here. Twenty seven facilities were built- a spacious one room school and house for the teacher, a family doctor's house and small hospital, a pharmacy, a large general store, a butcher shop, a restaurant, a movie theatre, a farm management office, a machine shop and small saw mill, a cock fighting arena, a post and telegraph office, a bar and pool hall, a hotel and eventually a home and an office for the community lawyer who would be Fidel. Eleven of the buildings remain standing to this day. Angel Castro built a self-

sufficient community where all types of services were provided so that people would not have to go outside for anything. The community built a dozen small homes as the land was cleared and the farm was expanded. Many workers came to live in the community and they said Mr. And Mrs. Angel Castro were a very compassionate and humane couple.

In this community there was no "dead time" ... dead time is outside the three months sugar cane harvesting when there was no work for many people elsewhere on the island. Here there was farming and many other chores to do year round. All employees were paid fair wages. When he died the people said it was as if they had lost their own father.

Fidel and Raul grew up amongst all of this not with communism or socialism but with "compassionism". When Fidel saw the abject poverty systemic in the rest of Cuba, as he travelled back and forth to Law school in Habana, he expressed to his mother a desire to extend the concept of his family's farm to other locations. She said, "why not all of Cuba?"

While attending law school he studied to see if there was some legal way to change the despicable dictatorship government in Cuba. Nada! During that time he led student protests against Batisita. His brother Raul joined him as an organizer. He was jailed several times and then he was exiled to Mexico. Raul followed him there.

While in Mexico he met Che Guevara. Che expressed abhorrence at what was happening in South America with multinationals forcing farmers into starvation. They joined forces to first set Cuba free with plans to do so in Bolivia, Venezuela, etc. The rest is history. When the USA tried to invade Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and were wiped out, Fidel conferred with the people and then said, "if the USA does

not like socialism then we will call ourselves socialist". In 2004, yes that is '04 the constitution was amended to read, "Cuba will never be a capitalist country."

One of our family member vehemently incorrectly pointed out to me just prior to leaving that I should always remember that "Fidel Castro has never been elected". I did not want to try to explain how Fidel has been elected for 40 years. Here goes now. Try to understand that whatever you may believe comes to you through US and CIA propaganda. Fidel and Raul must be nominated, accept nomination and be voted on within their own province, Granma, every five years like anyone else in the National assembly. There are 609 representatives in 16 provinces and the many local area councils within these. This is a secret ballot. In most elections at all levels of government, municipal, provincial and national the voter rate is approximately 97% as verified by the United Nations. In the last election Fidel and Raul were two of 8 candidates elected in Granma province, receiving 99.45% and 99.07% votes respectively. By secret ballot at the National Assembly Fidel was voted president. His closest advisor is a sanitation engineer in Bayamos who is extremely well read, highly respected at the grass roots level and very personable. When he picks up your garbage he listens to your concerns. All politicians are volunteers. Some are full time at every level but their government wages are generally the same as everyone although all travel expenses are covered. It is a great privilege to represent people in this country. The communist party is a small minority in government. The right of recall is a very easy process. A complaint is fielded, a secret ballot is held and a 51 % majority results in a re-election.

News Break

Fidel is NOT dying. Well not immediately. He is now 80 and has lost almost 20 kg, so something might be up. As my father – Grandpa Bill also 80, will somewhat understand, Fidel is no doubt feeling somewhat further along than his prime. As he has lead an incredibly fortuitous life in his first 80 years, it is almost as if he can see the liberation of oppressed abused South American countries on the verge of happening. His buddy Che's dream was to fulfill José Martí's goal, (Google/Wikipedia him). Martí dreamed of a day when all Central and South American countries would shake the Imperialist yoke of the American beast from their backs. Fidel would like nothing better than to see Bolivia, Venezuela, etc. free of the banana republic history and terror. Fidel was operated on for intestinal bleeding brought on by exhaustion. During his multi-week visit to promote a system of trade between Cuba and South American countries similar to the EU cooperation, he was continuously on the go and slept 4 to 6 hours per night.

Once the furour died down it was reported that Fidel had suffered from an attack of **Diverticulitis**

Viva Fidel

The love of Fidel is endemic here. Of course Che remains the exemplary hero of the revolution. People boast about the longest Fidel speech they ever sat through using terms such as inspiring. Our cameraman amigo Victor-Dennis tells a hilarious story in Spanish and actions. Four years ago Fidel gave an hour and a half speech away from the podium to some high-school grads. Victor was one of five cameramen. He was assigned to shadow Fidel on the stage with a steady-cam and film the audience. After a half hour Fidel was getting tired so he put his hand on Victor's shoulder. Within the next hour the steady cam was working overtime as his legs started to shake with the extra weight. When he got home he had to take a muscle relaxant and lay down. The way he told it was hilarious. I got it on film with his camera.

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