

## Yo Hablo Espanol

There is a fifty year old mistake being rectified now and I'd like to share my personal spin on the process. The United States is in the process of normalizing relations with Cuba. The "evil empire" to the South, the Darth Vader of the Caribbean, is about to start receiving tourists again from the U.S. and establish embassies in both countries.

For those of you who don't remember how we got here, Cuba used to be a big gambling spot and received a lot of tourist traffic from the U.S. The Cuban casinos were heavily influenced by the mob. Cuba was ruled by a U.S. friendly dictator, Batista, until the people revolted under the leadership of Fidel Castro in 1958. Castro seemed to be friendly to the U.S. but not the mob. He wanted the gambling and casinos out of Cuba because he felt they corrupted the soul of the people. Castro described his movement as communist, but he also seemed to be a pragmatist. As a result of his communist declaration, he lost a lot of support in the U.S., particularly among the congressman doing the mob's bidding. One thing leads to another and the next thing you know Cuba is looking at the U.S.S.R. for a trading partner. The U.S.S.R. was happy to place a thorn in the side of the U.S. The Soviets continued to push the envelope in Cuba until the world came within hours of a full scale nuclear war in 1962. The embargo has continued full force for 54 years in spite of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The sanctions have not changed internal Cuban politics one whit, and has only hurt the lower classes. The silver lining of this cloud is the finest collection of 1950's American cars on the planet, maintained in the most ingenious ways imaginable.

My unique spin to the Cuba story revolves around my Daddy and his second wife, Bonita. Daddy started courting Bonita in Atlanta in 1964 and they were soon married. Bonita, it was rumored, was Miss Cuba in the Miss Universe contest in the early 50's. She was divorced with two sons, the same age as me and my brother. During the courtship we got to know a few of the Cuban community in Atlanta and learned about some of the unusual concessions that the U.S. makes to "exiled" Cubans. In addition to a monthly stipend from the government, Cubans were given PX privileges which allowed them to shop for groceries on military bases. They also were eligible for

public assistance, Medicare, free English courses, scholarships, and low-interest college loans. For those of you out there who think there should be no "free lunch", direct your ire away from the traditional groups. Exiled Cubans are truly getting a free lunch for illegally immigrating to the U.S.

What is most galling to me is that you will never meet an exile that was not a millionaire plantation owner in Cuba. "We lost everything", they would say as they would list all of the lands and houses and finery that they had to leave behind to come to freedom. I've met so many of them, all former "Patrons" that I'm curious just who was doing the work back there. That's all about to end. With normalization, they should be able to return to Cuba and restore themselves to their former glory.