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Before the American embassy closed, long lines of Cubans waited, hoping to get a U.S. visa.

HAVANA (Continued)

trialization tax. We can't afford it, and I don't believe in it. Besides, it's voluntary."

"Do you know how voluntary?" my husband interrupted. "To get out of it, you have to write a letter."

"I'll write it."

"Then you have to go down to the Ministry of Labor to be interviewed, take along several pictures, be fingerprinted, and formally state your reasons for not 'volunteering.'" I gave up the idea.

As the months went by, fear rose in the Anglo-American colony like a silent flood. The premonitions increased at the approach of May Day when a giant million-strong rally had been summoned to show Cuba's "solidarity" against the U.S. Many Americans decided to fly to Miami till the day was over. Reasoning that we couldn't leave with each new surge of fear, we stayed.

Talking to a former Castroite turned counterrevolutionary, my husband voiced his fear for our family.

"If your wife's worried, I'll fix that up," said the counterrevolutionary who had once given his all for Fidel. "Tomorrow morning I'll send out two machine guns. Set them up in your house and take them back later."

We didn't accept, but we did remove the lawn sign bearing our American surname and stayed home.

"You watch television all day May 1, and if you notice anything about to happen, come over to my house," a Cuban friend said. "We'll move your car a couple of miles away, and no one will know you're here."

Practically every American family in Havana, fearful of communist-organized goon squads, had received similar offers from worried Cuban friends.

Our Son Is Brainwashed

We might have been able to take all of this if it hadn't been for our son, whom we thought old enough to distinguish right from wrong, communism from democracy. But brainwashing is insidious.

"Hey, Pop," he said one day, "did you know that a couple of years ago an American farmer got stuck in jail just because he overproduced?"

"Where in the name of heaven did you get that?"

"Why, my high-school teacher told us all

about it," he answered enthusiastically.

"Say, Mom, did you know that José Martí (Cuba's counterpart of George Washington) was anti-American and was actually, the first Cuban communist?"

"Dear," I replied, "you seem to forget that Martí spent most of his exile in New York City and that communism wasn't really an issue then."

"Don't argue," my husband said. "It's time to go."

We Tear Ourselves Away

Going wasn't easy. That last evening at home I walked in the garden at sunset, watching the western sky streak itself with glowing gold and crimson, with purple and pink, as it can only in Cuba. I touched the avocado, lime, and mango trees and tried to forget that I would never be tasting the fruit they were now bearing. And I tried to shut out the memories as I shut the house door behind me for the last time.

Now, when we should be reaping the benefits of years of work, we are starting over again, beginning from scratch without our furniture, appliances, china, silver, without even our souvenirs collected through the years. Those things were not ours, but part of the dwindling, depleted Cuban "wealth."

Yet we are fortunate, for we are here in the United States. We got out. There are many other Americans—perhaps 3,000 of the original 12,000—who haven't been able to make the trip for economic reasons. We write each other often, using codes which we hope will fool the censors. "My eyesight is very bad" means "Things are getting worse in Cuba." Sometimes we phone, although the wire tapping causes the conversation to sound as far away as Mars. And, although my letters tell them how difficult it is to adjust, how hard to start afresh, my friends in Cuba answer: "You are lucky."

Yes, very lucky. For this land, for this liberty, for this freedom from fear, I shall be ever thankful. Yet close to this liberty which we take so much for granted lies a sister country suffering, a sister country which once welcomed us without question but now is taught to hate us.

Havana harbored me for 18 years. It witnessed my marriage, the birth of my children, our successes and failures. Havana has been part of me and shall always be. Havana—poor, hapless Havana—was home.