

BEING COOL IN LATIN AMERICA



TOUR DIARIES

from the
**UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
CHAMBER SINGERS**
CUBA/YUCATAN/BELIZE CONCERT TOUR

APRIL 27 - MAY 15, 2001

Saturday, April 28th -- Darryl Neville

So here we are again, yet another tour journal. Well, welcome all you adoring fans of chamber singers tours. It's almost with relief that I say this could very well be my last tour journal entry, mind you, it's with a heavy heart that I realize it may very well be my last chamber singers tour. Anyways, there is much debate as to whether Saturday April 28th is really the first day on tour. Well, I say it is and I'm writing about it, partly because we had a great concert and Dan and I had a great night afterwards, but mostly because it's really only half a day to write about, hee hee, copout! Now, getting down to business, wait, airplane food coming, no writing on an empty stomach...

Alright, the "beef" sandwiches are done, the beer is gone, and Jon's gravel is starting to kick in. Time to write. The day as far as the chamber singers tour is concerned, started just before 3:00pm. I took my last ride in the love boat. My little bro dropped me off at the ferry and took the nightmare of that car upon himself. Good luck with that bro! I was early, but there were already a few of us there. We talked, and waited, and I finished off my orange juice. Finally we got ready to board the ferry. Oh wait, flashback time. I had been driving Dallas' ass around town the day before. One of the stops was to the drugstore. *Dallas loaded up on condoms for both him and Mark Beatty, picture that Dal and I walking up to the counter and setting down about 8 boxes of condoms.* The cashier certainly took a double take. Later that day, Dal passed out at my house, and when he left, forgot all his stuff there. So, upon arriving at the ferry terminal I tried to get rid of this bag of condoms ASAP, as it had already caused much embarrassment to me. When Dal arrived, I promptly called across the terminal "Hey Dal, I've got your bag of condoms here. There sure are a lot of them. You want them now?" and with a smiling face, Dal simply replied... "Karen has smelly feet!!!" Wait, no, that's what Karen told me to write just now. Okay, and with a smiling face, Dal simply called back, "Nuh Darryl, you keep them for later." Ha ha, touché mon ami! Anyways, the ferry ride was pretty uneventful. Dan, Celia and I were picked up on the other side by Lindsay, who was apparently organizing the entire Steveston Secondary stay. Along the way, I phoned my old friend from PA, Jason, and began to plan the night's festivities. We arrived at the school and were greeted with copious amounts of food. It was great! Pizza, fruit, cookies, juice, and best of all, cheesy high school music! Dan and I hooked up with our billet and went to their house. They were incredibly welcoming and had a beautiful house well equipped



with foosball table and t.v. with the hockey game on. Their daughters were pretty good looking too, but way to young for me and Dan. Well, for me anyways (Dan, you dirty old man!). So Dan and I exploited the foosball table (10-8 Darryl, 10-7 Dan) then watched a great hockey game go into overtime. It was then time to leave for the school. The concert, as would be the example for the entire tour, was fantastic. The crowd loved us even though we didn't sing amongst the plastic trees up on stage. My friend Jason



and his cousin Derek came and greeted me after the concert. Sometime during this day. We received notification that our first concert in Havana had been cancelled, so therefore, some caution could be thrown to the wind for the night. After a few more slices of pizza and clearing it with our billets, Dan and I were ready to "tie one on" as my grandmother puts it (aah, to grow up in PA!). We tried to invite everyone we could but to no avail. There would be no other "partners in crime" for the night. So Dan, Derek, Jason and I set out. First stop: the Flying Beaver. This was a "rustic style" bar catering to middle aged men who liked to match their wits at naming song titles and artists. Cassia...secret ballot on this bar? Oh...thumbs down!!! So we got our keesters out of there!! But hmm...what could be better than the Flying Beaver? Next stop: Mugs and Jugs. Yes, this was quite a classy place. I felt somewhat underdressed. Well, until Derek revealed his shirt of course. It seemed to fit right in. It was bright orange and on the front simply read "wannafuck". I didn't understand it myself. Was it German? Danish perhaps? Whatever language it was, the dancers all seemed to know it! Anyhow, after many a cold one (take that how you may) the bar (take that how you may) closed so it was over to next door with us for a little dancing. Dan actually was the only one to dance but I tell ya, if I'd known the Maya dance at that time, I would've had the ladies swooning, even those few that were under 40! Finally, the club closed, and after a pit stop at the court house (aah Rick, I miss ya man!) it was to our beds with us. We had an early morning coming up, and were thankful to get at least 2 hours sleep in.

Sunday, April 29th -- Cassia Streb

Okay guys, here it is... the most exciting day of tour. Plane, plane, customs, plane, customs, taxi and hotel! We arrived at the Vancouver airport at an hour so offensively early that I can't put it in writing. You couldn't really feel the excitement in the air as most people were present only in body and had left their minds sleeping back at the billets in Richmond. (Feel free to insert your own details about the plane to Huston because I can't even remember who I was sitting next to let alone what we ate...maybe Jon remembers.) Anyway, they let us into the United States and we got to sit in the airport and eat leftover goodies that Celia brought from the concert the night before. We boarded our second flight bound for Cancun, México at about 3:30pm and arrived a little over an hour later. Everyone started to get excited at the Cancun airport because you could feel the air getting warmer and more humid and we were almost in Havana! We checked our bags, bought our Cuban visas, filled out a million customs forms and got to sit down to a "meal" in the airport where our poor waitress tried to figure out everyone's handwritten bills with her broken English and our American dollars. The food was not terrific, but had we have known that these would be the last hamburgers with recognizable meat we would get while in Cuba (except for the burgers at the Canadian Embassy) we probably would have appreciated them much more. The plane to Cuba was a little less trustworthy than the others but it fared well and touched onto Cuban soil a half an hour earlier than we had anticipated. The arrivals area was quite small and had TVs blaring the national television network's low-budget comedy hour. We lined up to pass through customs where the officers glared at us over a high counter from behind a huge one-way mirrored little cage. Once they had confirmed, beyond a doubt, that we were indeed who we claimed to be, we were allowed to go through the little door into the baggage claims where all our luggage was waiting. Soon everyone was outside waiting in the hot evening air looking and feeling very tired.

As we had arrived so early, our buses were nowhere to be seen. In fact, they didn't even exist, or so I was told by the self-proclaimed head of the taxi company. I tried my best but they definitely wanted us to take the cabs they had waiting. So we wearily loaded all our bags into SUVs that were not unlike the ones used in Jurassic Park. We waited in the parking lot for all the cabs to load up when what to our wondering eyes did appear, but 3 little buses.... I don't think those drivers have ever taken off so fast in their entire lives and this is when we were introduced to the Cuban style of driving. You drive as fast as you possibly can and whenever you see anything that could potentially cause a threat, you honk. We arrive at the Hotel Universitario where Connie, Bruce and I went into the manager's office where he explained that we couldn't have the rooms we had reserved and that there would have to be a few rooms of three. No problem! The rooms were distributed and, I swear to you guys, through no Spanish wheeling and dealing, I got the coveted Presidential Suite complete with red velvet curtains and a matching bedspread all to myself! We finally got to bed at 2am with the air-conditioners blasting and the traffic outside our windows.

Monday, April 30th -- Connie More

This day started very early at the Havana airport, where the anticipated Panatavi vans never appeared, so we jammed luggage and people into several taxis. Arrival at the Hotel Universitario went fairly smoothly, although Cassia ended up without a roommate; thus she got the "honeymoon suite" to herself! After one a.m. Bruce and I got a visitor-- Jaime Ponsoda from the Coro Nacional arrived to welcome us. This was very fortunate, since we were then able to confirm a visit to the Coro Nacionales rehearsal a few hours later, as well as to "get the ball rolling" through Jaime for our Wednesday visit to Caturla Music School. It was a "short sleep" night-- 1:40 to about 6:40, followed by a pleasantly complete breakfast of fruit, juice, coffee, melba toast, bread, and eggs. Moments before our departure from Victoria, we had received an e-mail from Mark Beaty confirming that our planned April 30th visit to Artemisa had been cancelled, so our first full day in Cuba turned into a walking tour of Vedado, punctuated by 3 short performances and the first of many mealtime adventures. At the Coro Nacional, conductor Digna Guerre led her choir in a wonderful display of virtuosity and varied repertoire. Bruce and I previously got a chance to re-connect with many of our November-made friends in the group. Then we performed for them. Their initially warm applause became more and more enthusiastic and by the time their conductor led



her choir and our small chorus in "Chili con Carne" (oops-- they knew the 2nd verse in the repeat!!) the acceptance and mutual enjoyment were obvious. We presented the first set of gifts: 30 choral folders, a ream of staff paper, some blank recording tapes, and boxes of pens and pencils. All 3 choir levels (children, youths, and adult) also received some choral scores. A corner store yielded bottled water and other drinks, and then we proceeded to Seka's house-- the "B&B" where we had stayed in November and early December. Tears filled her eyes as we sang "Mercedes" on her porch. Most then took advantage of an opportunity to walk around the main floor of the house. Mark then led us to an area with many food stalls and restaurants, and people split into several groups to sample Cuban fare. We reassembled at the rehearsal site of Coro Polifónico where a surprised conductor Carmen Collado wanted us to return Wednesday instead, since some of her singers were away. This idea conflicted with ISA and Caturla plans, so we began a series of close encounters with this group by singing for each other. Our dear friend Ricardo joined Cassia in translation duties, and we were all saddened by the later news that his bicycle was stolen during the rehearsal. Free time sent several to the dollar grocery store; some went with Mark to hear Cuban music, etc. Bruce and I rekindled memories at a private "salader" restaurant, narrowly avoiding the tropical

downpour that reportedly saw several of our members dancing in the street in front of our hotel, much to the amusement of staff and passerby. This day represented the first of many "impromptu Cuban moments!"

Tuesday, May 1st -- Alex Dunn

Primero Mayo en Havana - the essential communist experience - ushered in our indoctrination to El Gobierno Cubano. Following breakfast at the Hotel Universitario, we comrades marched our way toward the Marti Monument where a sea of flag waving Cubans gathered. Friendly un-uniformed "helpers" kept a careful eye on the crowd while propaganda blared from the loudspeakers at every corner; we were handed small Cuban flags which we rattled at every opportunity while leaflets proclaiming ¡ANEXION NO - PLEBISCITO SI! rained from the sky. We nervously made our way toward a banner adorned with a Canadian flag plus a heart. It was at that moment we realized that none other than Fidel had been delivering a long winded speech uttered in a frightening monotone. A few of the fearless made our way closer as Felipe approached El Presidente almost close enough to stroke his socialist beard. Large effigy/puppets of Fox, Chretien and finally Yeeorje Dohble-Yoo Boosh were paraded out and performed a lurid dance to a tribal drum - a bizarre and disconcerting sight. We were swept along by the crowd toward the water in a combination of determined march and leisurely salsa step. After splintering from the masses, a small group of us decided to storm the US Interests Area and pelt the compound with mojitos. Unfortunately, our focus waned and we stopped for ice cream at Coppelia. Our communist fervor was further diluted when we taxied to Havana Viejo and began drinking mojitos. At that point, Karen started up with the bad Japanese accent, replacing 'l' with 'r', etc. I believe it was at that point that Phil admitted that he did "rub the Cuban erection." Some guy came up for Karen's phone number and informed her that he would "phone her in America." Both Jordan and Karen jammed with a group of musicians at the Plaza de la Cathedral, making a conspicuous addition to the tanned, smiling faces of the group. Although we were not exactly gripped with communist fervor, we caught a tiny glimpse into the national mentality - ¡VIVA LA REVOLUCION!

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Wednesday, May 2nd -- Haley Tarnow

I rise good and early to join the group in hailing a large procession of taxis to depart us to the Instituto Superior de Arte where Mark Beaty is studying. We were greeted with melodious music from various musicians practicing outside in the square overlooking a spectacular tropical view with giant coconut trees in a green field. After taking it all in



while singing some scales we performed for various students and teachers from the university. As it was breezy at times, some nice effects were created, especially in the impressionistic Boulanger. Afterwards we waited for lunch to be served in the caf, it was happy hour. We were entertained by Lucas and Philip jamming some blues on the piano and we did some tango and swing dancing. Later we took the city bus to exchange music at a Cuban elementary school of music. There, though it was hot as hell, I was completely taken aback by such an animated, talented and adorable group of kids who gave us a wonderful reception when we performed. It was sweet as they bobbed their heads back and forth with their eyes full of expression. After receiving each of the three enthusiastically, several little girls and boys presented their school scarf to whomever they thought was best looking. Among some of us most fortunate were myself, Megan, Dan, and Lauren. We were then left to hail taxis on a main road full of honking '50s convertibles and ladass where we needed to be aggressive, so the minute I had a chance, I jumped into a regular old car of a local with Dallas, Graham, and Felipe, which although we got a real deal, was illegal. Later on that evening, we had a little get together with the Coro Polifonico in the hotel restaurant which afterwards broke into singing by the piano and Latin dancing in the bar. This is also where I met Jaime Ponsoda (a golden member of the coro nacional) and his son Javier. I found myself temporarily infatuated and almost lost in Cuba. Thankfully with the support and direction from the group, I was soon led back into reality again. Special thanks to Grant, Leah, Geronimo, and Kiiri only among the few who with much patience helped me realize what was right.

Thursday, May 3rd -- Geronimo Morris

May 3rd, like all of my/our days in Cuba, was an incredibly rich, full and tasty day. I remember being in bed at the end of this day and thinking back on the journey that had started in the morning and all the different and neat things that I had done that day. For me May 3rd, was the day I spent in old Havana. After breakfast, (the obligatory scrambled eggs and fruit - papaya being Trish's favorite**), Cassia and I set out to the waterfront to walk along the ocean to Old Havana. Now when walking along the waterfront in Havana, the first question that comes up is; is there a time of day when people are not necking along here? I remember seeing couples even at 9 in the morning. I guess giving thanks to a new day with a big kiss-up on the water...I can't imagine this happening anywhere else. Of course there were also the waves crashing over the wall, and the children swimming in tide pools, and the fisherman, and the ladass and buicks zooming by. All in all it was a fine walk with Cassia in the morning sun of Havana. The first place we went to in old Havana was the Museum of the Revolution. Here we saw the sacred relics of the revolution; cairns, bloodied uniforms, old shoes worn by revolutionaries, old weapons and a whole section devoted to Che. Perhaps because of the romantic/tragic milieu of the museum and my own predilection towards such sentiments, or just too much breakfast, I found these relics to be very moving. To die for ideas. Ideas about how to make the world better for everyone. Ideas

about running the "World" in a wholly different manner than has been fashioned by the merchant/capitalist culture and its accompanying protestant docility. As Cassia said, "to die for the idea is to live" (sic.) So, that was cool. Every day Cuba exists is a kick to the groin of American moneyed power and as a good Canadian, I can't help but enjoy that. After the museum we wandered and ran into Dallas, who, of course, asked us if we'd like to go for a beer. So we did ... and sat and watched old Havana go by. Hundreds of Phil's dream cars. Well, we got hungry and went to find China-town to get some cheap food. After more productive wandering (it really is the funnest thing to do in Havana), we got ourselves a fine little box lunch and sat in back alley and watched more of the theatre/street life of old Havana ... laundry overhead, music, noise, kids, people sitting and watching us sitting and watching them.

It was time now to go off to the Basilica for our big concert.

note: owing to a still undiagnosed and likely incurable mental ailment, I forgot and so had to find a passable facsimile for the casual shirt for the concert. This I accomplished, but in the process I got thoroughly lost in old Havana, and its narrow winding streets, with different people offering highly differing advice as to the whereabouts of the Basilica. Finally after saying "agua" and making a salt shaker motion I made it to the oceanfront and then the Basilica. I was late but it was a fine bit of fun nonetheless. Well the concert at the Basilica was great. We sang well, and to be in that church and singing was a memorable experience for which I will always be thankful. Truly, things like this do not happen often in one's life. After the concert it was back to the hotel for dancing. This was the night we took over the bar at the hotel universitario. This night Isaw women move like I have never seen women move before. Hilda; how to



describe Hilda. To watch her walk was an erotic experience. To watch her dance is beyond the descriptive powers of the english language.

The Night of Terror

Wake up. Haul myself out of bed. I was just starting to get used to waking up in Havana. Get my stuff downstairs. Having missed breakfast completely, I went across the street to get sickly sweet cinnamon rolls and juice boxes from the store by the gas station. Our bus finally showed up (they always did), and we were off to Cienfuegos, aka Cuba stop number two. Here we experienced first hand the Cuban system of hitchhiking. People just wait at the side of the road for a ride. It's illegal to not pick them up if you have room. This resulted in seeing things like dump truck full of people cruising down the highway. Apparently seat belts aren't necessary here. At a nasty little tourist trap we stopped for lunch. Since everybody else seemed to run the place out of hamburgers, Dallas and I split three pizzas with the swarms of flies hovering around us. I think they probably had some of my tucola too. Anyway, we were herded back onto the bus (baa, baa...) and continued towards the resort.

The resort was, on first impressions, quite nice. Big spacious lobby, palm trees, on the water, etc. The PR manager gave us the low down on the hotel's various services while we worked on the free neon-green mohitos they gave us. These mohitos were not the same drink were we familiar with in Havana. Nonetheless, several of us downed the extras not wanted by the less adventure members of the choir, and the extras not drunk by those with simply higher standards. A free drink is a free drink guys. Geesh.

Felipe and I headed off to our room, where he crashed, and I made an executive decision to go swimming after that nasty bus ride. My first stop was the pool. This was your typical outdoor pool. Nice enough. Kinda maybe clean-ish. Reasonable temperature. I went to check out the beach. I found Jon on the dock. A couple people were in the water. Geronimo was busy swimming to the other side of the bay, foreshadowing part of his award, albeit not naked, not drunk, and in broad daylight. Graham and Jon and I jumped in. The water was *WARM*. Holy. I have never been in such warm ocean water. Hotter than Hawaii. It was crazy, and it was salty, which wasn't aided by un-

named person or persons swimming "down current" for a pee. Time to catch some rays. Several of us lined up on the boulevard's deck chairs for a while. Mmmm...sun. Several of us probably burned on those deck chairs. I headed over to the pool again. Dal had whipped out his frisbee, and some of us ultimate players started hucking that thing around. It caught on. This is where Darryl came "up" with Kiiri's tour award, so to speak. With eight people and two discs, we started dominating most of the pool with a hard-core game of pig in the middle. Good fun. More burning of shoulders and backs and such. It's the Caribbean. It's worth it.

I had a shower with some of Karen's shampoo (it's wonderful) and got ready for our next game of lemmings. All that physical activity had made me hungry. I headed to the bar/cafe/teria for some pre-dinner food. There I find some white folk, who tell me the hot dogs are only 50 cents. Excellent. Sadly, these are the same people who have been waiting for ten minutes to order. Through the haze of mohitos and sunstroke, I distinctly remember Mr. PR guy saying this was "fast" food. I was so naïve back then. This was



Cuba after all. After half an hour or so, I actually got two hot dogs. This would only be an indication of how fast dinner was going to get to us that night. As an official choir event, everyone, or almost, came out to represent. We were dropped off for dinner just down the road from the club we were expected to be at later. As it turned out, nineteen blocks from the club. But save that for later. The group splintered apart, with Celia and Darryl and I looking for dinner, and figuring that eating with everybody would be cost and time prohibitive. We were so right. Almost everybody wound up eating at the same place, outside a restaurant in the town square. We were serenaded by three mariachis. Then we serenaded them, hoping to connect in some way to avoid tipping them. No such luck. Oh well. Dinner was okay, although it took frickin forever to get it. The end table (chiefly Graham Specht, you hard-core macker you) passed some time talking to a couple of Canadian girls. Megan got some "cheese soup" that was basically flour and water, or something like that. Typical bill errors were made, and after a few hours, we managed to leave.

We began the trek to the club. This, as previously mentioned, was actually forty five minutes of our lives. Well, some more than others. It was on the causeway by the

sea we found Felipe, Dallas, and poor little sweet little Lucas, all very thoroughly inebriated. Again, some more than others. It seems that the boys somehow got it in their heads to find (a) some peso pizza, which they did, and (b) find some alcohol, which they did with great style. Not one, but two twixers of white rum, one of which was already empty by the time we showed up, and the other was a quarter gone. Understand that Dallas and Felipe were veterans of this sort of behaviour. They were hammered. Felipe was drinking the rum and chasing it with sips from a can of tucola, and Dallas was walking around with a Cuban guy in--well, I won't say what, but anyone who was there can tell you. Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. Then we had Lucas, who by the time I really noticed him, was being coaxed by Trish (I think) that it's easy to pretend you're sober. Just say, "I'm not drunk," which he was saying a whole lot. Maybe practicing, or maybe he just liked the sound of it. No one will ever really no for sure. Anyway, after a couple hits, I continued on my way with others, leaving some of the girls escorting Lucas, and G-Rob with Dal and Felipe. I think.

At this point, I wasn't feeling very good.

I started walking slower. Eventually, we found Bruce and Connie sitting on the side of the road, directing us to the club. It wasn't like any of the other clubs we had passed on our way there, which were packed with people, lots of dancing to hot salsa beats, etc. It was more low-key. Turned out they were doing a sound check. Okay, that explained the feedback and mindless strumming we endured for a while. Sure. I took a seat. Nobody has any pepto bismal or anything. I chat with some people from the local choir that's hosting our concert at the museo tomorrow. To my amazement, I can speak conversational French. That's crazy. (Cue Celia here. "Crazy?") I get a 7Up to try and settle my stomach. I noticed the same two Canadian girls from dinner and talked to them some more. Turns out they were both from Toronto, but living in Vancouver. One of them didn't speak Spanish, so an actual conversation with somebody, even if it was me, was a pleasant novelty for her, so we chatted a while. The live music had started, and it was pretty atrocious. By this time a serious war was brewing between the nasty food I'd been eating all day and my weakened and volatile intestinal track. Toilet cost money, and featured no toilet paper. This was an issue. But it's okay. I can wait. The girls head over to another club for better music and some dancing. I was invited, but I was feeling so sick that I just couldn't, plus the bus should have been rescuing me at any moment. Anyone who knows me can imagine at this point how sick I must have been feeling. Lucas, who was initially allowed in to the club has been booted for being drunk, and was taken outside by guardian angels Trish and Celia to throw up. Felipe was feeling just fine, drinking with the Cubans shot for shot. Hmm...that may have not been such a good idea. Kiiri pointed out how trippy the tables were and we spent a good twenty minutes just looking at them. I can only imagine that LSD would have enhanced the experience greatly. We were kind of hallucinating from fatigue anyway.



The bus was more than an hour late. In the minutes leading up to its arrival, I was seriously contemplating taking a cab back to the resort I felt so ill. Anyway, we hauled ourselves, literally, onto the bus. A lot of people were in some pretty bad shape. It had been a long day. For me, it was just going to get longer.

By now, I'm seriously looking forward to the sanctuary of the bathroom. The bus arrives, finally. I'm first one off. I get the room key. Felipe, however, is in desperate need of assistance to get to our room. So I'm dragging him, and trying to move as fast as possible. A few meters from the door, I leave him to fend for himself. I put the key in the lock and turn. Felipe sits down behind me. I turn some more. Nothing. I turn the other way. A lot. Nothing. The light is bad. I check the room number once more. It's correct. Shit. Danger Will Robinson, danger. Things ain't getting any prettier. I leave Felipe there, assuring him I'll get the staff to open the room. There must be a trick to the

lock. Neither one of us had had to open the door since our arrival, cause the maid did it then, and Felipe had been in the room all afternoon. I half sprint to the lobby. The desk is unattended. I can wait no longer. There's a bathroom off the lobby. The door is broken. I push it open. Ugh. It's a nasty bathroom. Half wall stalls, only one toilet, NO toilet paper. No paper towels. Open door by stalls to the pool. The floor is covered in-- I don't know what. A layer of something. Thankfully, there's no one in the bathroom. There's no good way to describe how nasty this whole situation was, but at least I had made it to the bathroom. Now I didn't know what my next move was. Quietly waiting, I heard...Darryl. I never thought I'd be so happy to hear Darryl. I shout from the bathroom stall. Surprisingly, he hears me. Darryl and Michael enter from the pool side. I sent Darryl for a roll of toilet paper, explained my room was locked, Felipe was in all likelihood passed out in front of it, and would he find someone to open it? A few minutes later, Darryl comes back to hand me a roll of toilet paper, and to prop Felipe up against a sink. Celia is with the manager trying to open my room. Darryl thought it was best to keep Felipe out of the way. Trying to make my way out of the stall, I notice my nice off-white pants are really filthy with I don't know what from either the side of the toilet or the floor. Ugh. Thinking, yeah, I'm wearing boxers, I remove the pants, cause my room isn't open, and the pants look...bad. In a momentary fit of stupidity, I put one sock on the ground. Oh wait, that's the bathroom floor. Ugh. Now my sock is wet and nasty. I used quite a bit of toilet paper cleaning up the floor, cause nobody should have to deal with that, and make a note to mention it to the manager. So now, carrying my pants, shoes, and socks, decide to make my way to my room. I leave Felipe propped up in some physics defying way against the sink. He's not going anywhere. I stash my stuff nearby the room so I don't have to haul it around with me, because the room is not yet open. Standing there are Celia, the PR manager guy, and a maintenance guy. They can't open it either. The manager is doing his best to say, in English, that no one can fix it until the morning, but they can break the door open for us and post a security guard outside all night. Once I convince him that I understand that he needs my permission and I give it, they break it open. I don't know if this is a common problem or not, but upon examination it looked like the lock was already broken on an earlier date. Bizarre. I thank them. They come in to make sure the room is okay, I guess. The manager and the maintenance guy chatted outside for a minute. Now Darryl comes in, helping Felipe onto his bed. Apparently, I had been wrong about Felipe. He moved. Darryl had bought some water for Felipe, with all the speed and ease of typical Cuban service. When he went back (I think) to the bathroom, Felipe was gone. Darryl finds him wandering around, and somehow Felipe falls down, knocking into a flower pot or garbage or something and maybe taking it with him. Anyway, his hand is sliced up pretty badly. They would have made it to the room sooner, but Felipe had to puke ALL OVER the patio by the pool. But now he was in the room. The manager was a little concerned by this point. He came in. Thought Felipe should have some milk. Felipe didn't want milk. Warm milk. Felipe didn't want that either. He wanted Felipe to go to the infirmary. Felipe didn't want to. Felipe's hand was bleeding on the bed. Celia asked for a couple of band-aids. The manager disappeared. Maintenance guy was still there, looking at the lock and trying to push it back into the door. Manager comes back, with nurse in tow. Now she's trying to see Felipe's hand. Poor guy. Given that there were now five extra people in my tiny room, I left. I found Michael, Cassia, Lauren, and maybe somebody



else (?) outside, having a cigar. I tried to relate this all, but Cassia was still trying to figure out why I was in my boxers. I knocked on Graham's door to see if he had any pepto-bismal or immodium, but he was too occupied with Dallas to help me out. Something about swordfights? Funny. Anyway, I got back to my room, to find just Darryl watching Felipe. He de-briefed me on the situation. Everything was now more or less copasetic. Felipe was passed out, and once again was defying physics with a bucket propped in the air by the bed below his head, but Darryl didn't think he would need it. Darryl left. Tired, and feeling way too nasty, I decided to have a shower, and try and wash my pants and socks.

Now understand that at this point, my whole perception of the situation is

somewhat...Faustian. My disbelief is suspended by what it is that seems to be masquerading as reality.

So I undress in the bathroom. I consciously think to myself, "the tour can only get better from here." I repeated this several times in my head. I brightened up a little, because hey, the tour could only get better. This was the low point. Things would only get better. I step into the shower. One more time, I repeat to myself that things can only get better.

I turn the faucet.



It falls off.

I am dumbfounded.

Oh God, no, not this, things were only supposed to get better. This *CAN'T* be happening.

I pick up the faucet. I try and push it back on. It's turning, and no water is coming out. None. I waited for lightning to strike me down. With my luck, it would have only been a crippling blow.

I have it in my head that there's this invisible line, somewhere in between reality and imaginary, chance and fate, and that somehow this line exists to preserve some sense of what can be dictated in this world. What can happen. It maintains balance. That line had been shot all to hell.

I stop, quietly wondering what I had done, cumulated throughout my entire life, to deserve a such an obvious conspiracy of collected tragedies. I realized this was a bad idea, partly cause I really didn't want to know, and partly cause it would take way too long. Instead, I tried the tap again. Sweet redemption. It worked. I probably spent forty five minutes cleaning me and my clothes. Whatever it was in the pants, it had set or something, and it just wasn't worth it anymore. I left those pants in Cuba. Came out of the shower. Felipe had thrown up, missing the bucket propped under his mouth completely. Truly baffling. I clean up, and frustrated with the way things were going, left. I found Darryl out on the dock, and for some reason he was smoking a cigarette, which as best I know, neither he nor I really smoke. We had three. Calmed down. Things can only get better. (Remember, this was all before my luggage incident, and my elbow problem. That entire time, I was like, "hmm...I guess I was wrong.")

Anyway, I got back from the dock, found Felipe still passed out, cleaned up after him again (narrowly saving some luggage), and went to bed, making a mental note get up on whatever side I hadn't gotten up on that morning. I then realized it had in fact, been a different bed I had woken up in all together. Never in my life has such a bizarre sequence of events transpired, let alone for such an extended period of time. I actually consider myself lucky to have gone through all that. It's easily one of the most memorable moments of my life, reflected in how much I've written about it. In truth, the entire tour was amazing for me. If there's any possibility of forgetting any of it, it will be eliminated by the vivid recollections of everyone who wrote these things. But that night...even at the time, I thought it was really funny, there was just also this nagging problem of experiencing it. Oh well. Like my journal entry, it's finally over now.

May the 4th be with you.

Daniel

Saturday, May 5th -- Michelle Cox