

**FEATURING:**

**Pedro Pan Mothers:**

Leonor Martínez de Valdivia  
Marta Ortega

**Pedro Pan:**

Maximo (Max) Alvarez, President/Owner of Sunshine Gasoline Distributors Inc.

Francisco Angones, Senior Partner, Angones, McClure and García Law Firm

Antonio "Tony" Argiz, Chairman and CEO of Morrison, Brown, Argiz & Farra, LLP, Miami

Dr. José Azel, Senior Scholar at the Cuban Studies Institute  
Eloy Cepero, Music Historian

Dr. Carlos Eire, T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of History and Religious Studies at Yale University.

Jorge Finlay, Business Owner

Elena Müller García, Parish Social Ministries Program Director, Catholic Charities of Palm Beach, Florida

Marcos Kerbel, Former Banker,  
Adjunct Professor of Finance at FIU

Melquiades "Mel" Martínez, Former HUD Secretary,  
Former US Senator

Juan Pujol, Business Owner

Eduardo "Ed" Rabel, Founder and Chairman of  
Rush Construction Inc.

Tomás Regalado, Mayor, City of Miami

Carmen Romañach, M.S. Psychology

Fr. Juan Sosa, Catholic Priest

Carmen Valdivia, Architect

Jorge Viera, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Estonia  
in Miami, Retired Banker

**Pedro Pan Caregivers:**

María Victoria Ortega, Catholic Nun/ Educator  
Carlos Oliva, Composer, Singer Songwriter;  
Camp Matecumbe Instructor

**Historian**

Dr. Victor Andres Triay, Historian, Author: Fleeing Castro:  
Operation Pedro Pan and the Cuban Children's Program

**Song:**

Nuestro Dia Ya Viene Llegando,  
Pedro Pan Willy Chirino

**CREDITS:**

Carmen Valdivia, Executive Producer

Carlos Gutierrez, Director/Producer

Nicolas Calzada and Edwina Lantigua, Film Editors

Dr. José Antonio Amaro, Research

Jorge Zamanillo, Executive Producer for HMM

Carmen Romañach, Executive Producer for OPPG

Carlos José Alvarez, Music

**PRESENTED BY:**



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PEDRO PAN GROUP, INC.®**

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Antonio L. Argiz / MBAF

Ismael Perera Family / Apex Marine Pompano LLC

**Bronze:**

Miguel Bezos

**Honorable**

Antonio Amador

Dr. José and Lily Azel

Ángel and Alina Córdova

Elvira Fernández Hasty

Mariana Home Boys

María de la Milera

In Memory of Guillermo R. Paz

Juan and Haydee Pujol

Eduardo and Sheila Rabel

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Jorge Viera

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**HISTORICAL DOCUMENTARY**

**OPERATION  
PEDRO  
PAN** THE  
CUBAN  
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## OPERATION PEDRO PAN: The Cuban Children's Exodus



### THIS IS OUR STORY

From 1960 to 1962, over 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban children left our homeland in what became the largest recorded unaccompanied child refugee exodus in the Western Hemisphere, later popularly known as "Operation Pedro Pan," a name first used publicly by *Miami Herald* reporter Gene Miller in 1962. Fearing our indoctrination by the newly installed communist government of Fidel Castro, our parents entrusted our fate to governmental and religious organizations in the United States.

We left through a network that included the Cuban and U.S. branches of the Catholic Church, private schools, and family contacts. Most of us ranged in age from 12 to 18, but some were much younger. We represented all regions of Cuba and various socio-economic classes and racial groups. Some of us reunited with our parents quickly, others after years of separation, and still others never saw them again.

### OUR PARENTS' DECISION

In January of 1959, most Cubans celebrated the overthrow of dictator Fulgencio Batista and the promise of a new democratic era led by Fidel Castro and the revolutionary government. By the fall of the same year, however, an increasing number of Cubans became wary of Castro. Many feared that the inclusion of Communist party members in his government, coupled with the incarceration and execution of members of the opposition, indicated a drastic shift to the political left. Cubans began fleeing the country and their fears were later confirmed by Castro's alliance with the Soviet Union. Our parents were confronted with making the life-changing decision to ensure our safety and future and elected to send us to the U.S. until we could safely return or they could secure passage abroad for themselves in due time.

### OUR DEPARTURE FROM CUBA

Father Bryan O. Walsh, a young Irish-American Catholic priest and director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, became aware of requests to provide temporary homes for Cuban refugee children in the U.S. In 1960, with the sudden influx of Cuban exiles, Walsh and other local leaders recognized the likelihood of an impending child welfare crisis. Meanwhile, James Baker, headmaster of Ruston Academy, an American school in Havana, was organizing a network of Cubans and expatriates to help get us out of Cuba. On December 12, 1960, Walsh and Baker met and launched the humanitarian program. Baker would get us out of Cuba and Walsh would provide shelter and care for those of us with no relatives in the U.S.

At the Havana airport, Cuban government officials separated us from our parents prior to departure. They allowed us to carry only a few belongings in a small suitcase or duffel bag, along with a personal item, and made us wait for hours before boarding the airplane. Officials held us in an area known as the *pecera* (fish bowl), named for the glass wall that served as a touch and sound barrier between us and our parents. Many of us left the *pecera* with doubts of ever seeing our parents or homeland again.

### OUR ARRIVAL IN THE U.S.

About half of the children arriving in the U.S. reunited with relatives or friends. The Catholic Welfare Bureau cared for the rest of us, placing us in temporary shelters, including camps and foster homes. Those of us with no relatives in the U.S. were instructed to ask for "George" upon arrival. Jorge "George" Guarch, an employee of the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Miami, picked us up and transported us to one of four south Florida camps: Florida City, Kendall, Matecumbe, or Opa-Locka; or to a local group home such as St. Raphael's Hall and St. Joseph's Home. In a handwritten log, Guarch recorded our names and dates of birth, types of entry visas, and where we went upon arrival.



One of the major challenges faced by Catholic Welfare Bureau was the lack of facilities in South Florida to care for our growing numbers. The Bureau solved this problem by asking Catholic Charities agencies around the country to provide foster care, group care homes, and Catholic orphanages as temporary shelters for us. These options were located in over 200 cities across 48 states and U.S. territories.

### OUR LIFE IN THE U.S.

While some of us lived with family members and friends, others lived in foster homes and orphanages, and still others lived in camps and group homes. Our living experiences ranged from—at the extremes—isolated instances of privileged lives with wealthy foster families to rare cases of abusive foster care situations. In the camps, the Catholic Welfare Bureau provided us with a structured environment for schooling, religious studies, cultural and physical activities, and a sense of normalcy. We visited other camps and attended parties and excursions, including trips to shopping centers, parks, and the beach. More importantly, camp workers encouraged us to maintain communication with our parents and we wrote letters on a regular basis describing our life in the U.S.

### OUR REFLECTIONS

Commercial flights between the U.S. and Cuba ceased in October 1962 with the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Under an agreement between the two countries, "Freedom Flights" began on December 1, 1965 for the purpose of reuniting families. Officials granted our parents first priority, and close to 90% of us still in the care of the Catholic Welfare Bureau reunited with our parents by June of 1966.

Until later in life, many of us were unaware that we were part of this historic exodus, which included mostly Catholic children, but also Protestants, Jews, and others. Looking back, we appreciate that our Pedro Pan experiences, both positive and negative, shaped our lives. We recognize the vital role of our parents, the Catholic Church, and the U.S. government in ensuring our safety and freedom.