Headmaster Fleming

AFTER WORDS

Dear T-D Family,

It’s taken a while to reflect on T-D’s travel-study trek to Cuba. I just can’t get it out of my head.

While Cuba’s everyday people looked like they could enjoy a good meal, the T-D family salivated as plates from 14 different restaurants became irresistible lures. As intense as the drooling may have been with those Roy G. Biv colors in front of us, the settings were even more polychromatic and inviting. If you love food, you’d love Cuba more.

Eating with the bluest of water as a backdrop the first luncheon was served in a museum like setting. It was an inside out dining experience. Thank God Sinatra ate there and slept there many years way, way back when. No one would ever have had to make his hotel as home great again. It was regal, royal and rich. With all kinds of bird life surrounding us and a three piece musical ensemble in sync with the setting everyone was swept away and swept back ashore as the tide harmonized. It was great background music.

Some of our restaurants were on UNESCO’s world heritage site list. Others were on streets unknown by those of the GPS generation. Sometimes we ate next to houses and homes that needed intense rehab and renovation, and sometimes we ate in settings perfect for Warner Bros. Studio or a Disney movie shoot.

One of the reasons I’d recommend Cuba is because everything looks so out of focus and one can so easily lose belief in one’s eyes. I passed an infinite number of homes in Havana and its surroundings
and most living quarters were easy to see in, see into and see through. All were quarter sized.

To repair, restore or bring back to life and make each abode livable one would have to purchase at least one item from every shelf at Home Depot. No! I didn’t see one; but with Cubans earning an average of $25 a week, it wouldn’t have mattered anyway.

Ironically there was a perverse charm in seeing churches, buildings and houses, so run down, dilapidated and in need of care that no one could live or frequent there, and then seeing the wash on the clothes line alongside a shack, just re-enforced how resilient the Cuban people are and have been. Having close to nothing for some is everything to most Cubans.

One didn’t need to speak Spanish to surf the island. Many Cubans speak English and profess a deep affection for America. It seemed to me that Cuba’s most attractive unspoken language was music. It was in the air everywhere. It could be heard on almost every street from the broadest avenue to the most charming hidden and lost alleyway. Of the 14 meals T-D savored, live music filled the rooms and spilled out to the outdoors stimulating those close by to dance. Copacabana was everywhere and cigar smoke provided lots of aromatherapy.

As a Communist country I assumed that there wouldn’t be any sacred ground, religious shrines or houses of worship. Clearly I was wrong and Cuban’s are quick to boast about three papal visits. More significantly God is alive in the hearts, hands and heads of the everyday Cuban as their warm smiles greet you from sunrise to sunset. I didn’t see one unhappy Cubano.

As a grey eagle, I did stand out a bit, but never once did I feel uncomfortable or see something that had to be avoided as I strolled each and every calle ocho.

Cuba has character. Cuba has charisma and Cuba was a classroom with more images than any smart board could provide.

Should you have the aspiration and need inspiration, Cuba will give you more than any of those mojitos you drink in Florida or any Hemingway novel you are reading.

Cuba didn’t leave me until this past Friday night, but it wasn’t for very long, as Steven Schlitten helped provide smiles, sunbeam faces, and an afterglow for all those in Taylor Hall at Christ Church in Bronxville. Was I in Cuba again?

It really doesn’t take a plane ride to smile like a Cubano. If you weren’t carried away with Cuba or the Sports Award Dinner, you were missing and it’s all on you.

Afterwards and after all the awards at the Sports Dinner, the smiles lingered long after the words and the aftermath. For today, Tuesday, there is still an afterglow.

Sincerely,
Douglas E. Fleming, Jr.
Headmaster