

Worker to 10-Year-Old Cuban Refugee

'You and We Are the Church'

By Sister Eve Gillchrist
Religious News Service

Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. — In the summer of 1942, some 20,000 U.S. troops crowded into the barracks spread out in the meadows of this historic frontier pass in Pennsylvania's Blue Mountains. They were charged with going "over there" and getting the job done. Today, 20,000 Cuban refugees sleep on those GI cots, lounge on the same white clapboard back porches and endure endless lines of interrogations and medical examinations.

Theaters that used to ring with buoyed-up soldiers now witness the tearful spectacle of Cuban exiles rejoining family members already in the United States being placed with other sponsors.

Indiantown Gap is one of four major U.S. refugee camps for the Cuban people who fled their homeland by small boat across the 90-mile stretch of

the Caribbean Sea separating their island from Florida.

It's bureaucracy that a visitor notices first. One Catholic chaplain at the base called the situation "a killing combination of bureaucracies overlaid one atop the other."

The military base has its own chain of command. The task force challenged to receive, process and redistribute to U.S. communities its population of 20,000 Cubans represents another cumbersome management. The four agencies aiding in relocating refugees are on 12-hour shifts in heroic efforts to provide the homeless Cubans the least traumatic entry into American society as possible. These, too, have their own bureaucracies — the U.S. Catholic Conference, Church World Services, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services, American Red Cross.

The more than 4,000

Hispanic and other visitors who daily request permission to see their relatives or friends at the Gap through a closely monitored system are frequently driven to tears by frustration and anger. Although teams of National Guardsmen are flown up every 15 days from Puerto Rico so that refugees are met by Spanish-speaking military policemen, the wait seems endless and the paperwork insurmountable.

The challenge to provide religious services to the 80 percent of the refugees who have signed in as Catholics is formidable. Father Edward Karnis, senior Catholic chaplain at the Gap, is concerned that none of his pastoral team speaks Spanish and that only five priests of the Harrisburg diocese, in which jurisdiction the camp lies, are bilingual.

Nellie Gomez works for the USCC at the Gap. She described the first Mass for Cuban refugees in a large base theater. "At the priest's welcome, their reply was to burst out energetically singing the Cuban national anthem. Asked if they'd prefer to leave before Mass or to eat supper, they shouted their preference to stay together to worship. Their anguished glances sought desperately to communicate. Sunburned and exhausted, they managed to stay standing, applauding and giving the peace signal with their fingers."

Father Sabino Estrado, who left Cuba eight months ago and is serving the Hispanic community of St. Rose of Lima in Rockaway Beach, N.Y., spent two days at the Gap. He wanted to see a former parishioner from Jesus Resucitado in Arroyo Arenas, Cuba. He found the man, José Rolando Campos, still suffering from the trauma of leaving his wife and children on the dock at Mariel. The boat saving four places for his family had taken in survivors from a launch that had gone down. They had only one seat left, so Campos came to the U.S. alone.

One of the memories that

lingers is of the young men who press on passersby letters to be mailed to a Cuban mother or to other relatives.

One 10-year-old Cuban boy asked Nellie Gomez how one can get into the Catholic Church of the U.S. He, a baptized Catholic, assumed the process was as painful as seeking asylum here.

Nellie's choked answer was to hug the boy and say, "You and we are the Church."

Day Camp

Genesee Settlement House, 10 Dake St., invites parents to consider its day camp for children aged 4-11. The six weeks of camp extend from July 7 to August 14.

Campers learn to swim,

participate in dance, music and arts and crafts, in addition to hiking, ballplaying and cookouts.

For more information those interested may contact Connie Perry, camp director at 288-1830.

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TOURIST POSTCARDS

An exhibit of contemporary postcards from the collection of Dan Younger, Visual Studies Workshop, July 1-31, Tuesday through Friday, noon to 5 p.m.

BENEFIT CONCERT

For the Rochester/Monroe County Chapter of the National Society for Autistic Children, featuring Bat McGrath, Old Salt, and the Dady Brothers, Sunday, July 20, 6 p.m. to midnight, at the Country Warehouse; ticket information: 467-9593.

BUDDY RICH

In a free

concert, Saturday, June 28 at 7 p.m. in Manhattan Square Park, marking the opening of the City's summer season of cultural activities.

MIME WORKSHOP

The Children's Storybook Theater troupe in a free performance, Sunday, June 29 at 2 p.m. in Manhattan Square Park.

DOG SHOW

The 42nd Genesee Valley Kennel Club affair, July 5, 9 a.m. at the Rochester Institute of Technology Campus. Proceeds to be donated for animal research and welfare.

BILL DOBBINS TRIO

in a free concert at Kilbourn Hall, Thursday, June 26 at 8 p.m. The group is just returned from Europe.

"RAPUNZEL AND THE WITCH"

Performance by the Tic Toc Players at 2 p.m. every day but Mondays and Tuesdays at the Nazareth Arts Center; ticket information: 586-2420.

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