

CATCHING UP WITH MONCADA

**In 1953 I was in high school
in Albuquerque, New Mexico—the young provincial
American middle-class girl.**

**My hero was still the captain of the school football team.
The word REVOLUTION was never mentioned at home
or anywhere else.**

**July of that year: another summer
full of projects—**

**wondering what the next few years would be like,
not yet questioning university-career-marriage,
“helping the poor and needy”.**

**Moncada wasn't mentioned
in THE ALBUQUERQUE TRIBUNE or THE ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL
or if it was I didn't read the news,
as distant to my life as the recent Korean War
I still thought “we” had won.**

**Remembering and talking about his brothers and sisters
who went with him into battle that July 26th
Pedro Miret says**

*All these comrades lived in the atmosphere that existed
throughout the country. A rotten atmosphere,
an atmosphere, in short, like that which exists today
in Latin America.*

I didn't know that atmosphere.

**In 1952 I had travelled to Latin America with my family,
the young American tourist
my eyes open to quaint restaurants and bargain buys.
Another thing completely outside my experience was any
was any understanding of the connection
between my tourism and that atmosphere.**

In 1956, in December, when Moncada survivors were among those who landed in the Granma and went into battle again. I had just returned from a year in Spain. On that December 2nd I would be 20 in a few days — still I didn't know about that other date, the one that had become a part of history. My special days were still singular, still my own. Europe had brought me a long way through the world and a halting way through pain but it was still "the western world" and still a very personal pain. Somewhere along the way I did learn that "we" hadn't won the Korean War but we hadn't lost it either.

By the time America crumbled around me and the Russian Revolution existed for me and the Chinese Revolution was real, by the time I knew the Korean War had been won by Koreans, my early civil rights marches, ban-the-bomb and big questions tore my hands and feet from first-person-singular and outside-objectivity I went to live in New York City. It was 1959. Fidel came too.

They turned me away at the police line on 125th and Lexington when I came out of the subway pregnant with my first child and carrying a gift in my hands, a gift for my new hero.

Cuba was the magical reincarnation of my remembered Spanish misery turned bright-future under the boots of bearded rebels. Fidel was giving my country's leaders more of a chance than they deserved and it was lost on them.

Moncada had been *a surprise action to disarm the enemy
and arm the people.*

That's how Raul Castro described it years later.

And the people used those arms and the Revolution triumphed.

I knew all about it now, but we were still miles apart.

Our destinies were searching each other out though:

The enormous gush of clean young blood (Fidel,

in his defense speech)

stained my eyes,

ran in my veins in retrospect and anger, spoke to me.

I was learning to listen and New York fell away.

I took my young son to Mexico to live,

began to inhabit the Third World,

walked towards a real perspective day after day.

Slowly, Cuba became a place, not a small color

on a yankee map,

and I was moving towards Moncada

a decade late but still within the range of Raul's words:

zero hour, as we like to call it, approaches rapidly.

Jumping still further ahead

I can say my son

is growing up a fighter.

Haydee Santamaria once said, *Why should it be difficult for us
to talk about something that wasn't difficult to do?*

It's difficult for me, and I'm just arriving.

Twenty years have passed.

Now I am here in this land that gave Moncada to the whole world.

Twenty years, rivers of blood,

men and women,

an Island getting bigger and bigger.

Twenty years and I'm 36: there are more children

and many more lessons.

**My heros have become whole peoples: the Vietnamese People,
the Cuban People, my own American People
struggling to wake up and more
towards our own Moncada.**

***Every people has its Moncada*—Nguyen Thi Binh told us that
at a meeting made possible by that first Moncada and all
that's happened since.**

The greatest setback and the greatest victory.

**Or, as Melba Hernandez said,
*Moncada was a victory because it showed us a way.***

**Margaret Randall
Havana / 25 December 1972**

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