



Video Story Transcript

CASTRO DOLLS AND FAMILIA

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://youtu.be/znpoXVYnvPY>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hola! I'm Leeny Del Seamonds and my story is called Castro Dolls and Familia.

Being Cuban American has meant a bounty of good fortune and positive experiences. My father and his relatives were born and raised in la República de Cuba. Their ancestors, having emigrated from España in the mid 1700's. Our family name is DelCastillo which is Spanish for of the castle. Mi papá nació en Cienfuegos Cuba. My father was born in Cienfuegos, a harbor town on the southern shore of Cuba. His name was Wilfredo Augusto Felipe DelCastillo Icopate and his nickname has always been Del.

When Del was seventeen, he came over to Los Estados Unidos, The United States, to make a new life for himself. He was smart, likable, and extremely handsome. And once he stepped onto U.S. soil, he never looked back. Now Del was a firm believer in speaking the language of his new country. So he spoke fluent Inglés by the time he finished high school. Yet he never lost his Spanish accent, which has always been part of his charm. By 1940, most of Del's immediate family had come over to join him in the greater Philadelphia area. There, my dad finished high school and college and then he became a U.S. citizen so he that could serve in the Army's Flying Tigers unit during World War II. He changed his name to Wilfred DelCastillo and his nickname, Del, remained.

Now in 1946, at a party, Del was introduced by a mutual friend to a fiery redhead named Alice Lorraine Guiterman, known as Lorraine. Her parents had been performers in vaudeville. Bessie was a concert pianist and Barney was a stand-up comic who also sang in a quartet. Their youngest daughter, Lorraine, had inherited a beautiful singing voice unlike anything Del had ever heard. It was amor a primera vista, love at first sight.

Within months, they were married and settled in Collingswood, New Jersey. That's across the river from Philly. There they had two daughters. Their oldest was named Alice Lorraine. My Cuban relatives lovingly called her, "Alicita Linda," pretty little Alice. The youngest daughter, me, was named, Eileen. No middle name, just Eileen. My Cuban relatives called me, "Eileencita," little Eileen. Well, I didn't mind except I thought that my first name euphonically didn't blend with the last. Eileen DelCastillo. Thank goodness for my nickname, Leeny. It sounded better, Leeny DelCastillo. But in Collingswood, New Jersey, we were the only residents who correctly pronounced our last name. Often my dad was called Del Del Casteellio or Del Del Costello, or Del Del Castro. Daddy didn't care what he was called as long as it wasn't Spic.

There were times growing up I thought that I was living with Lucy and Desi Arnaz. Like Desi, my dad was handsome with a thick accent and a charm. And like Lucy, my mother, never learned how to habla español and she was a zany redhead. She tried to speak Spanish but she often confused some words. Once when my parents were newlyweds, my dad had all the relatives over for dinner. And when the dinner was ready, Mother proudly came out and announced to her new Cuban family, "Hola. La comida está ala cama. Vamonos ala cama!" Everyone stopped talking and looked up with great surprise. Daddy shot mother a look too. See she had confused two words. Instead of saying "mesa," table, she had said "cama," bed. So she had proudly declared the dinner is in the bed. Let's go to bed! Through the years, this anecdote gave mi familia lots of chuckles. But no one appreciated it more than my parents.

When I was almost three years old, my two aunts, Lilia and Lordes went back to Cuba for a visit. When they returned, my grandmother whom we call, Mamá, hosted una fiesta maravilosa, a marvelous party to welcome them home. After la comida, the dinner, my aunts went and got bags of souvenirs and began doling them out. Colorful shawls and castanets for the ladies and café cubano and cigars for the men. And for the four young cousins, what did we get? Dolls! Fidel Castro dolls. Each doll had a plastic face with thick tufts of hair sticking up and a full beard. The doll's body was dressed in cloth that was stuffed and it wore a khaki colored uniform with a matching Army rebel cap sewn into its head. The men cried, "Dios mio! What kinda propaganda is this, eh? Are they trying to romance the country with caca?" My aunt Lilia just ignored them and proudly presented my sister Alicita with the first Castro doll. It was a blue eyed Fidel with yellow blonde hair and a blonde beard. My cousin, Alita, received the brown eyed Fidel with orange-red hair and an orange beard. My cousin, Denise, gotta brown eyed Fidel with chocolate brown hair and a brown beard. And I, the youngest, was handed the black eyed Fidel with black wiry hair and a full black beard. I took one look at this ugly doll, "Ay miu feo!" burst out crying and ran from the room.

That was the cue for the adults to demonstrate their passion for debate and heated conversation. The men cried, "Castro is a scoundrel! He's no better than the corrupt Batista! But at least with Batista, we know our enemy." The women held their ground, "Ay, Fidel and his brother will bring about positive changes, si. And besides, ay eres muy guapo y simpatico, (he is handsome and nice)." The men shot back, "Está usted equivocado, you are wrong! Fidel and his brother Raul cannot be trusted. It is 1955; we know a corrupt dictator when we see one. This will be bad for Cuba." The women held their ground, "No, he will bring about positive changes. Ver da, true."

From my hiding room in mamá's bedroom, I could hear the living room a buzz with arguing but I didn't know why. All I knew was that I wanted the blonde haired Fidel not this ugly looking thing with a hideous black beard that made him look angry. I decided to give this doll an extreme make over. A few minutes later, I emerge from the bedroom, dragging my new present by the arm. My uncle, Tonio, spotted me. "Oyè, mira mira lo que Leeny! Hmm. She seems to know something about Fidel the rest of us apparently do not."

The room hushed as they saw what I did to my Castro doll. He was buck-naked with most of his black beard torn out and all of his hair pulled out. He looked pathetic. And that's how I got the credit in mi familia for knowing the truth about that dictator and for being a good judge of character.

I've always wanted to go to Cuba. I never could. I wanted to... just be in this... Cienfuegos on the waterfront. I wanted to sip mojitos and listen to ritmo, the rhythm of jazz, and watch the sunset silhouetted in the sky. But I wanted mi papá to take me. Whenever I asked him, Daddy would say, "When Fidel dies, I go." Two years ago I asked again. "Hmm. When Fidel dies, I go."

"But Daddy, you're not getting any younger and Fidel is still hanging in there."

"Hmm. So am I. When Fidel dies, I go."

Sadly, Daddy's passed. So my hope is on...that someday I'll go. I will. (Said as father) "I go." And as I stroll along Cienfuego Bay on that smooth hot sand, I will be strolling in mi papá's beloved footsteps.