

Rotary



Club of Mt. Shasta

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Heather Maria Solus
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Mt Shasta Rotary Meeting 3-17-2021

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

Call to Order & Welcome
Pledge of Allegiance

Thought of the Day:

◆ Life is short, break the rules, forgive quickly, kiss slowly, love truly, laugh uncontrollably, and never regret anything that made you smile. ◆ ...Mark Twain
◆ Live life not your age. ◆ - Mike Rodriguez

Guest Speaker/Program:

DG Mark Roberts thanked Mt Shasta Rotary for the club's generous donation during 2019. Mt Shasta Rotary is a 100% club with 100% of members donating, and a 100% per capita club.

Bob Vila, formerly of ◆This /old House◆

Gary introduced Bob Vila and relayed how they worked together in the Peace Corp in Panama for two years. They remained friends ever since. They also worked and knew each other in Germany. Gary said he knows where Bob's heart is and how much this project means to him.

Bob Vila thanked Gary and commented on how great it was to communicate through the magic of Zoom.

He discussed Cuba today, especially after/during COVID, as well as the impact the policies of the Trump administration had on Cuba.

Many people thought Bob was Italian from his TV show, ◆This Old House◆. His parents left Havana for Miami. Bob was born in a small town in Florida. Castro overthrew Batista in the 1950s. There was a string of ruling dictators in Cuba for years. During the recovery years in the 30s Ernest Hemingway and his first wife Haddy lived a house they entered in Key West, Florida. Today that house is a museum. They often would end up in Havana on their extended marlin fishing trips.

By the late 30s early 40s with their harbor, Havana became a place of intrigue. Bob's father and friends tried to protect the area from the Germans during World War II. They captured Hitler's man in Cuba who was giving intelligence on Havana harbor so U-boats could get in and sink liberty ships.

For Hemingway the war period wasn't exciting times. He would take his fishing boat and go on sub-hunting trips along the coast. By then his second marriage was failing. He was seeing another woman who insisted they buy a proper house for him to write from. They first rented a run down home and then purchased a year later. They were able to buy the house and make several improvements from income he received from Paramount from the movie ◆From Whom the Bell Tolls◆. At some point, his wife, who was a war correspondent, went off to report on the war front. The marriage was failing and she essentially dumped him.

The people who came into power the next few years were not friendly to anyone who was in government during the Batista years. This was why Bob's parents moved to Florida. This was the era when mafioso came to and invested in Florida.

For Hemingway, the period after the war was extremely productive. After the marriage ended there was extensive travel. He met his fourth wife, who was a writer. It was she who turned La Finca Vigia into a fabulous home. Over time, they added a guest house for his sons, from a previous marriage, to stay. The house itself is not large and his wife has little patience for teens.

They also built a pool which was popular with guests. Mary also had a tower built. Her idea was to provide Hemingway a place to type. He preferred to write in his bedroom standing up on his Royal typewriter which was perched on a bookshelf.

The fabulous fifties were also the happiest years of his life. La Finca was the only home he owned - for about 50 years. He was a packrat and kept papers all the way back to his childhood. This is why there is such a trove of memorabilia and books - many filled with notes in the margins. He also had retained extensive correspondence with his editors.



In 1954, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for *Old Man and the Sea*.

Bob and his family returned to Cuba when he was a ten year old boy. In March of 1952 the government was overthrown again. Hotels, casinos and roads were built. The mafia, as mentioned before, also became more entrenched at that time.

This was a difficult period for Bob, as a ten year boy. Growing up, he only knew about his father's coffee business. It was a shock to learn they were moving to Cuba. Also, his father always continued to work with the US Government, particularly the FBI. By now, the work was about the Cold War rather than the Nazis.

Bob was plucked from Miami as a happy-go-lucky kid into a completely different world in Cuba. He was put into a bi-lingual school. They lived there for the next 3 years.

This was the time which also inspired a student to start a revolution, Fidel Castro's initial foray ended badly after an attack on military barracks. He was imprisoned, but was released after a few weeks. Castro went to Mexico and reorganized. He reinvaded the island with a second hand yacht, which is now in a museum. This time he sparked a terrorist approach, which included setting off bombs in nightclubs and other atrocities.

Bob was exposed to the violence of a civil war. He became aware of war, he learned about ouzis, and had bodyguards to take them to school.

During this time the US government developed concerns about Castro, as he has sympathies for Communism and Marxism. Sadly, the attitude of the U.S. began to change into one of acceptance that perhaps these bearded rebels following Castro were like Robin Hood. During 1958 Bautista abruptly announced his departure.

Bautista had summoned a couple hundred of his officials to the presidential palace, and said, "Gentlemen we are leaving. Gather your families and get to the military airfield and get there quickly." They left in a hurry, with their plane taking off at 3am. The plane was probably overloaded by 100%. The next morning, New Year's Day, they landed in New Orleans. They were surprised with all the American agencies there to greet this plane full of Cubans. There was only one American aboard and that was Bob Vila.

He reabsorbed into being an American kid. The stuff that happened in Havana captured world attention. It was a time of violence. The people who didn't make it into airplanes, were lined up against a wall and were shot.

Hemingway didn't want to leave. Castro began to use him for publicity stunts. It was a year later in Ketchum, Idaho where he bought a house, that he killed himself. Mary Welsh, his wife, was able to return to Cuba to collect his belongings. This was during the Cuban Missile Crisis. She had a connection to Jackie Kennedy. Part of the agreement she made was that she leave some manuscripts which are now in the Kennedy library.

Bob's foundation's mission started with a modest goal to see what correspondence was there between Hemmingway and his literary agent, which is an interesting story in itself. During the first visit, they went through Jamaica and came as tourists. They managed to talk with the director of the Cuban-operated museum (which Hemingway's house had become) and asked if they could help preserve it.

The Cubans were wary of Americans at first. The challenge of convincing Cubans their intentions were good took several years. They slowly built relationships. Under the terms of the embargo we are not allowed to bring in materials. Bob was able to sneak in some Craftsman tools during various visits. During those years they eventually gained the friendship of people who ran the Hemingway museum. The foundation, now, is nearly 20 years old. Bob's involvement is 14 years.

The Cubans have been trying to re-roof and undertake other jobs. During the first few years, they did manage to re-roof, repair and replace some windows and other patch jobs. During the Obama administration, when relations eased) they had the ability to raise funds for a paper conservation library. This coincided at a time when American industries were trying to get their foot in the door in Cuba. Several large companies invested in this project, which helped raise \$2.5M dollars.

These efforts were responsible for bringing in five container loads of building supplies for the project. This was the first shipment into Cuba since 1958. The Cubans, who were behind in understanding modern construction technology, didn't know what to do with the materials. So experts were brought in to train Cuban college students as they performed the work.

They were able to inaugurate the building and continue to grow relationships with the Cuban Ministry of Culture. Unfortunately, the last four years during the Trump administration with Mike Pompeo and a tightening of the embargo, have made things challenging. However, with several people involved, they are proud of the work they have been able to do. They are still able to bring over experts and hold lectures. With the completion of the new Museum, most documents were transferred to the vault.

Conservators from six other museums in Havana were able to be trained in best practices. Cuba is a nation rich in historical items such as ledgers from galleons full of treasures and gold which were

shipped to Seville. These items have been able to be saved through this work.

Q&A

Tom asked if tourism might open up in the future. Bob said the biggest challenge is that Mike Pompano put Cuba on the list of terrorist states. It will take 4-6 months at the earliest to get Cuba off that list. COVID is the biggest challenge to any travel currently. Cuba did a full lockdown, but opened early two months ago. The conditions there now are bad. By 2022 hopefully the cruise industry will start coming in and airlines such as JetBlue might be able to come back.

Gary said he had the pleasure of standing in the room where Hemmingway stood and typed his great works. He wondered what all went on in that room. Gary was interested in the building itself and whether it could withstand the ravages of regular hurricanes.

Bob said they had an architect with the specialty of historic restoration, who helped design the new museum. The year before they were told it was impossible. What they put together would have not been a success without the help from a company called Crissman in Chicago. Crissman would send a skeleton crew that would bring other subcontractors, who would teach young college students how to use these materials as they are so behind in Cuba.

The building now is basically a bunker and an American masterpiece... and the Cubans love it.

Ken asked about political science. In a way there is a scientific experiment going on. Obama opened up access with Cuba, then Trump closed it down. What is the evidence that the freedom of Cubans actually opened during either of these administrations.

Bob - what we saw during Obama was good and bad. It made it possible for a generation of Cubans to do things they could never do. A lot of Cubans living in American were able to go back to Cuba, bring inventory and open stores. It demonstrated they hadn't had the ability to open a business in Cuba prior to that. Before there were only ration cards and lines in order to buy goods. Sadly the last four years have done a great deal of harm. The Cuban government continues to violate human rights. Our new administration needs to open up travel and demand the Cuban government needs to address human rights. We weren't strong enough during Obama, he hopes Biden will be better at this.

Tim S was over there 10-11 years ago on a tour. He enjoyed the tour of the Hemingway House. He noticed a lot of European countries were able to go and travel freely and asked if this that still going on.

Bob - COVID has caused everything to stop. The Trump administration has caused airlines and travel to not to business there. A lot of hotels are controlled by the Cuban military. Hopefully, we will see changes in that direction.

Gary asked when Bob thinks he will be able to visit Havana again. Bob doesn't think it will be in this calendar year - perhaps 2022. Their biggest effort now is to fund-raise. They have a concise report on the condition of the house, which is bad. The collections are at risk. The windows are in bad shape, many are 60 years old. They open the windows every day, and there are no insect screens. Visitors can't go in the house, but look in through the windows. It has been a challenging time, with COVID, to do any fundraising at all.

Bob Vila will turn 75 in June and will celebrate with a jubilee. He is on four boards and doing fundraising campaigns for other projects. He is very focused on architectural restorations, his grandchildren, gardening and getting out on his boat when he can.

To learn more about the Finca Vigia Foundation and how to donate, click [HERE](#).

**No Happy Bucks
No Marble Game**

Birthdays



[Pat Titus](#)
March 17th

Wedding Anniversaries

No Wedding Anniversaries Found

Years of Service

No Years Of Service Found

Club Meeting

Mt. Shasta
Meets at Normally, Mt. Shasta Resort. Currently via Zoom. Contact us at mtshastarotary@gmail.com for link to join a meeting.
1000 Siskiyou Lake Boulevard
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067

