

01-03-2014

Usually it's just the last six weeks before the journal comes out that are really frantic, which means that the few weeks in the early part of the production cycle are my best time for things like haircuts, medical appointments, exploring Havana and socializing. The April issue is so much bigger than a normal one, that the frenzied phase has already begun, weeks early.

For weeks I've been putting off my getting my hair cut because Saturday is the only day I can really manage it and in February all my weekend days were filled with other things (such as having fun with my wonderful visitors from Chile). Since my hair grows faster in the back it's starting to look like I'm working on a mullet. So I moved a bit faster than I usually do on Saturday, to get to Kenia's before the cola got too long. To my dismay, the gate was closed. It bore a sign, which a woman was reading with a look of resigned exasperation; it said they had moved to a new location 21st, #1312 between 22nd and 24; that's my street number and block, just one block closer to 23rd, so I thought it would be a piece of cake to find. Nuh-uh. We walked along 21st and the last house was numbered 1316. Just beyond it was an alley, at the end of which was what looked like the back side of an apartment building. We walked down to it and saw no number, so concluded it was indeed the back of a building that fronted on 19th, across from my place. The other woman had read the sign more carefully than I and mentioned it said the new place was *en el Callejón de 21*. That made me think it must be in the other part of 21, my favourite shortcut to 23rd (21st is interrupted by a large quarry-like military zone that houses an entrance to a system of tunnels originally outfitted as air-raid shelters in case of a US attack). We walked around there, but the first number we saw on 21 when it started again was 1264. Baffled, we asked a passerby, who showed us a narrow walkway that connected 22nd with the rest of 21st. It was in fact the building we had seen before. There was no number anywhere, but at the far end there was a gate with a small sign saying *peluquera*.

But our odyssey wasn't over. They had just moved yesterday and were still setting up. Their first day of business is on Monday. Hmmm, it might have been a good idea to put the opening date on the sign. And a map. The next piece of bad news was that they were only going to open on Saturday once a month, and didn't yet know which Saturday it would be in March. I pictured myself looking like Wayne Gretzky by the time I could get to see her, but then she said that if I called during the week she could stay after five.

By then I was too hot and tired to go to the agro, so I stopped at Cuba Libro for a coffee, served with a piece of delicious *panatela*, a sort of pound cake with chocolate and nuts on top. When I found out it was from the new pastry shop on next block I had to go get one to take to work on Monday. The price was shocking: only \$1.50 for a whole cake that must have been baked in a small bundt (sp?) pan. The clerk said they wouldn't have them tomorrow but assured me it would still be good on Monday, and not to put it in the coldest part of the fridge, or it would dry out.

When I got home Niurka was downstairs giving Estrella's a mani-pedi and I impulsively asked her if she had time for me afterwards. A mani-pedi and a long chat with Niurka (we drank a whole pot of tea) were just what I needed to get over my disgruntlement at the waste of Saturday morning. Although, it wasn't a total loss: I did discover something new about my neighbourhood geography, plus found out about the panatela bargain.

I briefly considered going to the concert for the Cuban Five tonight on the university *escalinata* (the setting for countless historical events, principally because it's where the student movement massed for anti-dictatorship demonstrations). Fernando González, the second of the Five to be released, returned to Cuba last week. His story is particularly sad; he was in Miami for only a short stint and was about to

return to Havana to get married, when he was arrested along with the others. So this concert was to celebrate his release, as well as to honour the Five. I opted to watch it on TV. Well, with one eye, anyway, while I did a bit of the more routine bits of editing (removing extra spaces, putting the reference brackets where they belong, translating the author credits. It was the usual such concert: one of everything, from *repentistas* and traditional folk genres to nueva trova and *nueva nueva trova* and jazz. I only really stopped working for Tony Dávila, because he's the one who does the song I like about the timbiriches.

02-03-2014

A video crew (organized by Rodney and Romesh) was supposed to go to bike polo to get some footage for our fundraising video and I spent a good part of the morning on the phone, drumming up attendance. At about five Romesh texted me that they couldn't make it and said they'd be there next week. That will be better anyway; Vladimir is in Santiago de Cuba so Laura wasn't here, and Conner is in the States, so this way they'll be able to get some footage of women who can really play. If I were the only one, I'd give female players a bad rep. I didn't actually play in a game today; by the time I had finished warming up and there were enough bikes there to play, my shoulder was getting sore so I decided to pass. I lent BamBi to Michel to play on, swearing him to caution. I took some photos, but I can't get them off my phone, for some reason.

03-03-2014

Jorge told me this truck is owned and driven by a doctor, who practices medicine half days and runs an informal taxibus service the rest of the time. I wondered aloud why he doesn't rent it out to someone else to drive so he can practice full time. Jorge's response: *codicia*. Greed. Driving himself, he doesn't have to share the profits with anyone; and he can make in half a day what he could make in a month as a doctor.



The decal on this car's rear window is hard to read without zooming. I would have cropped it more severely to help legibility, but I didn't want to lose the moody sky (no, that building is not on fire). Anyway, the decal reads *Alpine Technology Advanced*. I guess the manufacturer's advanced technology didn't include a spelling checker.

I called Kenia from work this morning and arranged to get my hair cut at 5:30. I feel pounds lighter and an inch taller.

04-03-2014



From my bedroom window: a typically Cuban solution to a shortage of storage space.

And from my morning commute, a Cuban solution to a different problem.



06-03-2014

When I opened the stairwell window this morning I saw a young girl, about 9 or 10, wearing a longish black flamenco-style dress, with her hair up in a ballerina knot topped by a red flower or scrunchie. She was running down the street, lifting her skirts with both hands. A Cuban flamenca Cinderella rushing to beat the clock?

Yesterday I had a meeting with an author and worked from home the rest of the day. When I got in the car this morning I almost asked Jorge if he'd had a good weekend, since it felt like a Monday morning. We laughed about my time disorientation. After he dropped me at ENSAP, I ran back out, thinking I had forgotten to pay him for the week (I usually do that on Monday). So, I'm not only disoriented as to time, I also have short-term memory loss. ☺

The International Women's Day greetings are already starting to fly. I hate to be a Grinch, especially about IWD, but I'm already overwhelmed by the volume of email I have to wade through every day. I feel mildly resentful about having my inbox loaded with cute greetings and pictures of flowers and puppies. And more than a little resentful of my colleagues who use Reply All to send their thanks to the perpetrators.

Jorge and I disagreed about the likely make of this car. We agreed it looked English, but I thought it was an Austin and he thought not. We overtook it at a traffic light and I rolled down my window to ask the driver. Yep, an Austin, the driver told me proudly.



Julio had his hernia surgery yesterday. He said he has hardly any post-op pain, but is concerned about the amount of swelling and discoloration in his genitals, which he described in the most vivid terms. Too much information.

08-03-2014

I was just settling down to work this morning after a rather slow start, when I heard loud music coming from across the street (where the president of our CDR lives; all CDR block parties and events marking important anniversaries are held on the street in front of her house). I turned off my working music (Frank Fernández, Ernesto Lecuona, Glenn Gould and Angela Hewitt) with a sigh and went to the window to see what was afoot. About a hundred people were assembled, about half of them sitting on folding chairs lined up on the street itself. *Of course*, I thought, *an IWD event with speeches and loud recorded music; there goes my concentration for an hour*. Then I saw the children wearing the distinctive black-and-yellow costumes of La Colmenita (literally, The Beehive), a children's theatre troupe. Actually, now one of many; the idea caught on, and now pretty much every municipality has its own Colmenita.

Niurka told me later it must have been the Plaza chapter. She also said, with a meaningful look and slightly nose-out-of-joint air, that the organization reports directly to the Council of State. I.e., not to any cultural organization (Niurka works for the network of Casas de Cultura). That points to someone very influential having been able to bypass the usual cultural infrastructure and get support directly from the political level. I'd love to know more about that bit of history.

09-03-2011

Feeling cranky and out of sorts today. I didn't realize the clocks leapt forward today, and I worked until almost 2 am standard time. Also, my right leg is covered with mosquito bites, ankle to knee. Now why would one leg be so much more attractive to the nasty critters than the other one?

When we got to the cancha today there was a basketball tournament going on, but it was the final game. They left quite a mess on the court and it took us a while to clean it up without proper brooms. The mess consisted mainly of popcorn, the small plastic bags the popcorn was sold in, soft drink cans, and a surprising number of condoms and condom packets. Tomás assured me that the kids had been using them as water balloons. I wonder if they any of them came from Cuba Libro.

The woman from INDER was there and introduced me to her replacement, Amaya. Turns the video crew that was supposed to come last week wasn't for our fundraising video, but for a music video, of a group called 3 de la Calle. Romesh has something to do with them, I'm not sure what, but not as a musician. The video is supposed to have scenes of various sports, not just bike polo. When they couldn't come last week, they filmed Romesh in his Havana Bike Polo t-shirt, maybe riding his bike and swinging his mallet to steal the ball from an unseen opponent?

11-03-2014

It's literally one step forward and two steps back this week: yesterday I got one manuscript to translation and two manuscripts came in post peer review. Today I sent one more for translation and two more manuscripts came in. Sigh.

Had two reminders of a wonderful visit last year: this morning I finished off the last of the maple syrup Ralph and Marcelle brought me (I had been using it in ever-decreasing amounts on my oats for the past couple of weeks, trying to make it last until I got north in May. Ah well. I'll appreciate it even more after an absence. And tonight I finally tried Enid's recipe for Irish soda bread. I was about to heat up some peppery soup I made on the weekend (from a sad-looking cabbage, a couple of carrots, some corn soup mix that Lorena brought e from Chile, and lots of onion, garlic and black pepper—the latter unintentionally; the cap fell off the jar while I was sprinkling) when I realize I had not bread or crackers in the house. It was amazingly quick to make; I had realized how much so, I'd have done it long before this. I didn't have any baking soda so just used a bit more baking powder than called for; it turned out fine, although a bit lopsided. Lacking a rolling pin, I just patted it down and it was a good half inch thicker on one side than on the other. I suppose I could have used a bottle. I ate half of it. There's nothing like hot bread with butter. Next time I'll try it with some oats.



A welcome sight on my ride home! I'll have to see if I can get down to Tulipán on the weekend and get some taters.

The decal on this window says, *If you hate me, why are you looking at me?*



12-03-2014



It looks like Havana it is going to implement busses-only lanes, or at least pilot them. On Friday these signs appeared on Boyeros and on Monday morning there were pylons marking off the right-hand lane and for a stretch between Ciudad Deportiva and Via Blanca; police were at the start of it go make sure only busses entered, but most of the busses seemed to stay in the all-vehicle lane. The only thing I saw

enter the bus lane the whole way was a bicycle. After Monday the pylons disappeared by the signs are still there.

A cold front is coming through tomorrow, with lows of 14 expected. Brrr, better get out the woolies.

And even better news. ENSAP has found someone to refill toner cartridges. Finally. It made me sick to think they were only being used once. And now I won't have to devote 10% of my luggage space to printer cartridges when I come back from Canada.

Speaking of recycling, there was a heartbreaking article in *Juventud Rebelde* today, about the abandonment of an award-winning recycling project in Guantánamo. It fell victim to jurisdictional disputes and bureaucratic ineptitude and the person who founded it and ran it for 12 years—and won CNN's Defender of the Planet award, among others—finally resigned in frustration and now runs a cafeteria as a cuentapropista.

When I got home from work tonight Julio and Estrella and a couple of neighbours were discussing the dismissal of some fairly senior people at CIMEX and TRD over revelations in a *Granma* article in January that replacement parts for imported induction cookers had found their way into the hands of resellers. There was a statement that the parts should only be in the repair shops and never in stores, whether state-run or private. The last line was a rough translation of the line about not seeking to know for whom the bell tolls, by way of a warning to others running the same sort of game.

13-03-2014



After work I went by the Almacenes de San José to pick up a tile I ordered for Lorena and Dante's house when I was there with them in February. At first I couldn't find the stall, even though I thought I knew exactly where it was. Then I looked up and saw a tiled sign; the stall was closed, which was why I had walked by it twice without noticing it. I asked a woman across the way if they always closed that early. She called to another woman, who had a key and knew about my order. I was so glad not to have to make another trip.

I went to the new pastry shop on the next block to order a cake for a meeting tomorrow but they were all out of the kind I wanted. Since Conner is going to the meeting too, I paid for the cake and she'll pick it up tomorrow afternoon before she goes.

14-03-2014

Rosita brought me a bag of potatoes today and tonight I had my annual all-potato dinner: buttered boiled potatoes with pepper. I've either lost my taste for salt or the butter here is saltier than in Canada, because I find that I don't need to add salt on anything buttered. I did sprinkle a bit of merkén on half the potatoes. I love the flavour of the smoked ají, but I also wanted just the plain goodness of buttered potatoes.



The bakery was out of flour this morning and the cake wasn't ready in time for her to bring it to the meeting. Good thing I didn't tell anyone it was supposed to come. When I picked it up after work I found out I'd been calling it by the wrong word. They call it a *panqué corona*. Although panqué has to come from pancake, it's Cuban for cupcake, and for this round coffee cake. A bargain for \$1.50 CUC. I had a bit

of it with Yunior after my physio. Will share half with Estrella and Julio and take the rest to work on Sunday.

15-03-2014

Cooking in Cuba (like most things) is all about improvising. Even though I named my cats after it, I've never tried to make Bubble 'n' Squeak, because every recipe I've seen for it calls for sausage or some other meat. After my experiment with merkén on my potatoes yesterday, I decided it might work for B'n'S. So for dinner tonight I threw some of the taters I boiled yesterday and the last of the limp cabbage into a frying pan with a bit of oil and butter and it bubbled and squeaked quite satisfactorily. Tasty too. When the cabbage was nicely translucent, I tossed in my last egg beside it to scramble up, with only the briefest pang of anxiety over when I'd be able to get more eggs.

Merkén is my new favourite seasoning and is now a staple in my kitchen. Until I run out of it.

Just had a delightful conversation with a Swiss visitor who was trying to call the Havana Libre to find out the telephone number of the Karl Marx theatre. He explained to me that an Infotur pamphlet lists my number as the hotel's. He was so nice and sympathetic that I looked up the Karl Marx number for him in the yellow pages so he wouldn't have to make another call. I should start noting the various numbers I get asked for in my hotel persona and then I'll have them ready for the next person who asks.

There was an announcement this week that cell phone users with a nauta.cu email address can now receive email on their phones. I was thinking of getting one for emergencies (i.e., the frequent times when I can't connect from home on weekends). Gail gave me a better idea: get Infomed to anchor my account to my CUC phone. I hadn't realized that I could have a second telephone number on the account. The CUC phone line might even be faster than the peso one, and if I just use it for emergencies it won't likely be any more expensive than opening a nauta.cu account. It will be less confusing, and there's a bonus: I won't have to stand in line with thousands of Cubans wanting to get a nauta.cu address. Anyway, it's another sign that, little by little, Cuba is moving with the times, even if she's a few steps behind. In some things—no one could argue that Cuba's behind in the quest for universal access to health care, and that covers a multitude of sins.

16-03-2014

One of those "naked-in-public" dreams had my heart pounding when I woke this morning (in grade 9 it was having my slip showing at a school dance, in high school it was looking down from my music at choir practice and seeing that I had no clothes on). In this version, I was late for dinner with my public health mentor, Bob Spasoff, and his wife; I had laid out my clothes on the bed to put on after my shower, but when I went to get dressed my slacks were missing. I was standing there in just my blouse and undies when Sylvia and Bob arrived. That's when I woke up. I lay in bed watching dust motes dance in a beam of sunlight until my heart slowed and I felt ready to meet the day.

It doesn't take Sigmund Freud to figure out what that's about. With pretty much every issue of the journal there's a point when I wonder whether this is the one that's going to completely fall apart in my hands. The April issue has all the usual stresses multiplied, and not only because it's so much bigger than any before (fully one third more content pages than our largest previous issue), but it's also politically fraught.

The theme is the chronic kidney disease epidemic in Central America (and a few other countries). We know the issue will be scrutinized to the nth degree by Monsanto's (et al.) hired epidemiology guns,

searching for grounds to discredit any evidence suggesting that agrochemicals might have a causal role. Already they are investing millions in research intended to show that the cause is dehydration and heat stress, since it affects mainly young male farmworkers, principally in sugar cane. They've even brought global warming into the argument, but increases in temperatures over three decades couldn't begin to explain the scale of the epidemic. Nor has the heat/dehydration camp ventured an explanation of why the epidemic isn't affecting other countries (such as Cuba) where it is equally hot, and where manual cane-cutting is just as strenuous. We've zealously tried to recruit manuscripts from all quarters; at least no one will be able to say that *MEDICC Review* is just a platform for one position.

It's all rather asymmetrical. Those who argue that agrochemicals play a role don't rule out dehydration as a co-factor (after all, it would increase the concentration of toxins in the kidney), in fact, describe their hypothesis as multifactorial, but many in the other camp seem determined to prove that heat and dehydration are sufficient in themselves to cause the damage. Hmmmm, wonder where their research funding comes from...Just as in the case of tobacco, it's in the industry's interests to keep the scientists arguing as loudly and long as possible, to delay any policy response that might hurt their business. El Salvador has already invoked the precautionary principle to ban the sale and use of certain pesticides, and the spectre of that happening worldwide must have industry execs shivering in their Armani shoes (Monsanto's glyphosate is the most used globally, and is specifically implicated in studies from Sri Lanka).

And, of course, the whole thing is overlaid with ideological conflict. The nephrologist who did the first population-based study in El Salvador and now heads the country's renal health unit (so far the only such unit created in any country in response to the epidemic) is a graduate of Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine, and PAHO advisors on his study include Cuban experts (because of a major nephrology study done on the Isle of Youth). As happens in many countries where ELAM grads work in remote and marginalized areas where domestic docs won't go, the Salvadoran medical establishment is rabidly hostile to ELAM grads, and to Cuba. They and the right-wing media hysterically equate the idea of an agrochemical connection with a communist plot to undermine private enterprise and democracy.

Well, this isn't advancing my work on the issue. I'd better get back to editing, before I give myself a full-fledged anxiety attack.

Later...



I took a break to play bike polo, with the intention of playing only two games and being back at my desk by five pm. The best laid plans, etc.. I was the first to arrive, so I made friends with these little guys while I waited. Tomás showed up 15 minutes later, but with only one mallet between us we couldn't have a game. Enrique and Alexander came along not too long after that, but only one of them had a mallet. I decided to at least ride one-handed around the court to at least get some practice managing the bike again; I've felt very insecure on it these few weeks that I've been back playing. Oddly, I felt even less confident without a mallet in my hand, I guess because I can always use the mallet to recover balance.

It was almost 5:30 before we had enough people to play a real game. A boy from the barrio, also named Alex, showed up and it took only a wee bit of urging to get him to play. He got a goal in his very first game. Not only that, but right off the joust!



I played two games, resting my for one in between, even though my team won. I was going to leave after the second one, but by then Romesh had arrived; since he can't play on his bicitaxi, I lent him BamBi for a couple of games but said I couldn't stay 'til dark. During the second game, someone crashed into him—I'm just glad I didn't see it!—and BamBi had her first flat in Cuba (that's actually quite remarkable). Tomás and Vladimir said not to worry, they'd have it fixed for me in a jiff, but when they got the tube out they discovered that it wasn't a puncture at all; the valve stem was broken right in half. Romesh offered his bicitaxi as a bike ambulance and he and I and Laura headed for my place, with Bambi's top tube resting on Laura's and my knees, Laura holding the pedals and me holding the front wheel so they wouldn't poke Romesh in the back.

As we came to a stop at 12th street there was a loud pop, like a firecracker. The front tire of the bicitaxi had exploded. Romesh upended it and pushed it like a wheelbarrow and Laura and I took turns shouldering BamBi. He had a tube with him but no pump, so was going to fix the tire at my place and use my pump. Alas, he was missing a crucial tool, one I didn't have either. It took a strangely long time for Vladimir to get here, because he had stopped to fix it for Enrique! I had spare tubes for BamBi here and Vladimir got her fixed up in no time, but Romesh had to go to a ponchera to get his bicitaxi functional again.



If I were superstitious, I'd say that this all happened because at the beginning of play Choncho said he hadn't had flat for nine months. Or because I superstitiously refrained from saying that I hadn't had one since moving to Cuba. 😊



Shortly after Vladimir, Laura and Romesh left, Tomás came by with his daughter, Lorena; he had seen my missed calls when I was trying to find someone who might have the tool Romesh needed. Poor Tomás, he spent days making collapsible goals for us, and then someone stole them from his yard. Amazingly, the two plastic barrel lids he hung up at the court for tapping out were still there today.

I don't think I'll get much more work done tonight. With all my company this evening I was left without a drop of filtered water in the house and along with other Sunday evening chores that will likely take me pretty close to bedtime.

17-03-2014

Not a great start to the week. I lit the water heater when I got up and didn't notice until I was in the shower that the gas had gone off and it the water was still chilly. Normally, I welcome cold fronts, but not when there's no gas. Then the power was off when I got to ENSAP. It came back on just when I was starting to think of giving up and going home.

I'll have less and less time to keep my journal as the month gets busier, but also fewer things to write about. From now on I imagine this will be mostly photos, with sparse comments. And the photos will be mostly from my commute. For example, this elegant machine parked down the street. I get a kick out of seeing the odd ways Cubans personalize their almendrones, and the ingenuity with which they make do when they don't have the right parts, but it's sure a treat to see a car so lovingly and respectfully



maintained, or more likely, restored. I imagine very few people would have been able to keep a car in this condition during the Special Period

18-03-2014

Granma reported today that this February was one of hottest since 1981, almost three degrees (Centigrade!) hotter than the historical average for the month. There were only two cold fronts in the whole month. February is usually one of the coldest months of the year

A beautiful German shepherd ducked its head just as I got my phone out to take a picture. The vehicle is from the police canine unit.

20-03-2014

We had our first layout session with Aram today, for about three hours, then Gail and I had dinner with Diane and Pierre, the new (since December1) executive director of MEDICC. He was in Cuba in December, but I was in Chile then, so this was our first meeting. I quite like him.

It was good to have a meal that I didn't have to cook! I'm afraid my diet will get worse and worse as production ramps up. I'd better go to the agro this weekend. I used the last of the quinoa cereal Lore brought me from Chile, so at the very least I'll need bananas, since I'm also out of maple syrup. Having the quinoa and maple syrup has spoiled me for eating my oats plain. A little bit of sweetness with the crunch of peanuts makes breakfast a treat, not just something to fuel me up for the morning. Now if I could only find raisins...

21-03-2014

The news everyone's talking about today is the announcement of pay raises for health personnel on June 1. The new pay rates will be from double to almost triple current ones.

The money will come from sliding-scale agreements countries where Cuban doctors and other health professionals are working. Until recently, payment for their services was the exception rather than the rule, but Cuba can't sustain that degree of altruism. Cuba will continue to foot the bill for poorer countries, like Haiti and some African countries.

And of course there's still constant speculation about the timetable for eliminating the dual currency. Consensus—best guess—is by the end of 2014.



This one I took because a dyslexic sign painter reversed an N in *medicina legal* making the word look vaguely Russian.

And this one because the VW logo on the window seemed particularly incongruous., but I also like how the dome of the Ciudad Deportiva framed it.

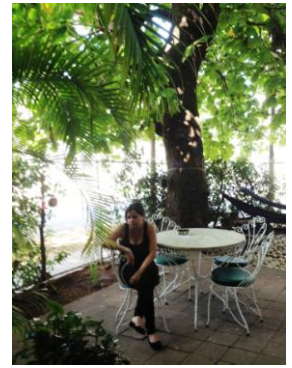
Too bad it's not quite in focus.



22-03-2014

I got overzealous at the agro this morning and bought a whole papaya (the Cuban ones are huge, not

like the smaller ones I saw in Venezuela. *Fruta bomba*, you have to call them in Havana; *papaya*'s a bad word; it's the other way around in eastern Cuba. I recently read a *décima* that cleverly described the dilemma and concluded that the only way around it is to refer to it, always and everywhere, as the fruit of the papaya (papaya tree). When I stopped by Cuba Libro for a coffee and to see if Conner wanted half the papaya (I can say that among friends, right?), Annet was there waiting for a MEDICC group to arrive. She commented on the powerful trees in the patio. In AfroCuban religion, the almond tree that gives such wonderful shade is Obbatalá and the royal palm in the corner is Changó. Here Amaya, a new staff person, is enjoying the protection of Obbatalá.



I missed the opening of the new art exhibit there and it was the first time I had seen the paintings. There are only a handful, but they are stunning. Luckily for me, my favourite—a surrealistic Viñales landscape with a mogote in the shape of the Buddha—is too large for any space I can imagine myself ever living in; he's asking CUC\$3500.

Conner's building is still without water, so I lent her some clean sheets. She has company arriving from NYC today.

So that was my outing for the day. I'll try to be very disciplined for the rest of the day so I can take a break for bike polo tomorrow. It occurs to me that I might not have the stamina to do this job much longer.

Oh, I have to mention a rather felicitous name I came across in *Granma* today (not a Y name). A number of small campuses of different institutes in the province of Mayabeque (formerly the eastern rural part of City of Havana Province) have been amalgamated to create a new university called the *Fructuoso Rodríguez Agrarian University of Havana*. Besides the lovely irony of an agrarian university being called after someone whose given name means *fruitful*, I thought it odd on two other counts. First, it is no longer in Havana, since provincial boundaries were redrawn in 2010 and the new provinces of Mayabeque and Artemisa were created. Second, it offers a number of programs that have not even a tenuous connection to agriculture (e.g., education, accounting, phys ed). I looked *agrarian* up in a Spanish dictionary, though, and it can mean *rural* as well as *agricultural*, so I withdraw my objection (puzzlement, rather) on that count.

I called Silva tonight and he's having a hard time on his own—this is the first time in must be thirty years that he and Liliana have been apart for any length of time. They still haven't heard from the Canadian embassy about visas to visit Luisi in Ottawa, so when Liliana had a chance of a three-month US visa to visit Gaby in Ft Myers, she took it. She left on Sunday or Monday morning last week. I imagine that was a tearful reunion. Luisi is going to visit them in April. I invited him for tea tomorrow afternoon and he's going to go to bike polo with me.

Arrrgggghhhhh!!!! What a pain. To connect to the internet I have to hold the modem plug in the USB port or it loses its contact. If I let the thing go—because of a cramp in my hand, for example—the connection fails and I have to dial again. Since I'm not adept at one-handed typing, that means I have to download messages in one session, read and draft my responses offline, then reconnect and paste my responses to send. I sent Eddy an SOS. I don't know whether I need a new modem or the problem's in my USB port.

23-03-2014

Things are moving along fairly well, although I'm getting nervous about the two manuscripts that still need to be translated. If the authors don't get there revisions soon I might not be able to get a translator.

Anyway, the day was productive enough that I felt ok about taking a break for bike polo. On the way there, Vladi and I did a traffic no-no and went up 14th the wrong way to turn left on 21st. Just after we turned the corner a police officer flagged us down. She said to Vladi, *You were going the wrong way on a one-way street. She's a foreigner, but YOU have no excuse!* I told her it was my fault because I was in the lead; we both apologized abjectly and she let us go with just a stern warning. Interesting, Silva always said that they don't tend to enforce traffic regs for cyclists; this is a good sign.

Not too big a crowd today, but more than enough for two teams. I ended up lending BamBi to Chachi, since I didn't want to play until most of the court was in shade.

Silva came to the court and took some photos with my camera. Here's Tomás giving me The Stare. As if his sheer size weren't intimidating enough.



Dang, Missed again!

Conner had a showing of the documentary, *Maestra*, at Cuba Libro this evening, but by the time I showered after bike polo I had zero energy for going out again. She and her friend Stephen stopped by to pick up the papaya and a couple of other things. She mentioned she wanted to have another Scrabble night, and we both turned to Stephen and asked, in unison and in almost identical tones, "Do you play Scrabble?" Then cracked up.



24-03-2014

Can't figure out exactly what make of car this is. The back end has been altered by one of those creative Cuban body mechanics. The tail lights are from a Lada, but it's anybody's guess what the rest of it is. Maybe an English car, maybe a '52 Chev. Ah, the many mysteries of Cuba.



Not sure what this one is either, but its rear wheels seem to be meant for a car about twice its size.

Some 25,000 people in Old Havana depend on these trucks, called *pipas*, for drinking water.



Something came up for Yuniór and he couldn't come for my physio appointment tonight, so I invited Conner and Stephen over for leftover rice and some of Niurka's mom's beans after Cuba Libro closed. Conner had said she was exhausted, so I thought it would be a quick dinner and then I could work for a couple of hours. We talked until almost 11!

Conner told a story about the Sol Meliá hotel chain, a Spanish firm that used to have hotels in the US as well as Cuba. Seems a few years back, the folks in charge of enforcing the blockade called some senior muckamucks from Sol Meliá to a meeting and told them they'd have to choose between operating in the US and operating in Cuba. *Fine*, they said, *we'll close down our US hotels*. I love it—I'm sure that's the very last thing the US officials expected to hear. Even though the Cuban market is a small one, the Meliá execs might have figured they could face a Latin America-wide boycott if they chose the US over Cuba.

This billboard at 26th and 51st is for a campaign on violence against women. It says, *They deserve love. No to violence against women*. A rather namby-pamby slogan, to my mind, but I like the way the rose looks like a balloon held by the girl walking by.



30-03-2014

Hulene and Michael arrived Friday night. We decided to have dinner somewhere close to home, and walked up to the Bodegón del Asado. Sigh, it was closed, and there was no sign saying whether it was just that night or permanently. Second stop was Lala's where we were very well fed. Afterwards I worked until after 3 am so I could spend some time with them today without feeling too pressured. Jorge took us out to Jaimanitas yesterday morning. There've been a lot



of changes since I was there last, including a large murals of the Granma, (with Che, Fidel and Camilo recognizable and a few other people I didn't recognize) and of Hugo Chávez (I'm old enough that "Chávez" by itself will always mean César) and a half-finished mural dedicated to Mexico,



Fuster was at home and I asked him when he ever sleeps. Seems he works at night and sleeps in the daytime. That would explain why I hardly ever see him. I wondered when he found time to be so prolific when he never seems to be in his studio.

We stopped for coffee and cheese sandwiches at the Café Fortuna on the way back in town. When we asked if it is still state run, they said they are in the process of taking it over as a collective. I'm hearing that more and more these days. Jorge dropped us at the Meliá Cohiba where I withdrew my rent money and we made our way home via the Servando Cabrera museum, the Casa de Amistad con los Pueblos (where we refueled with excellent mojitos) and the Museum of Decorative Arts. At the latter there was a special exhibit of mosaic art by a collective of architects and designers. The flyer said they were located on 2nd between 19th and 21st, so we made a small detour, hoping to see the studio. It was closed by then, of course, but I'm planning a return trip, as soon as things settle down a bit at work.

Yesterday we took an almendrón to the Capitolio and walked around Old Havana, seeing all four of the major plazas. We discovered a bonsai store near the Plaza Vieja. I must have gone past it a dozen times since it opened about three years ago and I never noticed it before. I ended up buying two, and for the rest of the afternoon, everywhere we went people yelled out to us, *¡bonsai! ¡bonsai!* Some of them asked where we'd gotten them. I had no idea bonsai was so popular in Cuba.

I hadn't promised to go to bike polo because I didn't want to rush our paseo, but when we passed the cancha on the way home they were still playing, so we asked the almendrón driver to drop us off so we

could say hello. I felt bad: my BamBi would have been the sixth bike so there could be two complete teams. Hulene and Michael were the first visitors to sign the new banner that Enrique made for us.

We had dinner at Juana la Cubana on our way home. They always have produce as the table centerpieces, and the one next to our table featured a Siamese potato that looked like a heart. Alexis's girlfriend, Patricia, was there and chatted with us for a while. She described a peña they have on the second Sunday of each month at 3 pm, basically an open mic sort of thing, with everything from a neighbourhood kids' dance troupe to trova to a rap group of elderly women (I wouldn't have believe it if she hadn't shown me the video). Alexis is supposed to be back from Switzerland sometime soon, for good this time. That must mean the restaurant and casa particular are doing well.



And that just about does it for March. Brenda arrives tomorrow and I will probably be up late enough without spending time journaling. If anything memorable happens tomorrow I'll have to include it in April.

Since I have more than half a page left, I'll stick in some photos from the weekend. I might have taken one of this before; it's one of my favourites in Jaimanitas. It's interesting, though, how even when some of the individual tiles aren't particularly pleasing, the combined effect is very much so.



One of the new attractions at Jaimanitas, this one in (or rather, on) Fuster's house.



This is the building the camera oscura is in, one of my favourites.



Up to 909 Y names now, with my new acquisitions: Yamirka Yaneya Yarislei
Yaynelin Yerlandis Ylya Yoalis Yoelianis Yoendrys Yosnier Yuleisy Yulexys
Yusleni