

# In Remembrance of a Close Friend

*The following article is a letter written by History teacher Orlando Gutierrez to his close friend Mario de la Peña upon learning of de la Peña's death while taking part in a search and rescue mission for the humanitarian organization Hermanos al Rescate.*

Hey, little brother. I knew as soon as I got the news in Mexico City that you would be among them. They didn't give me names at first, but I knew you'd be aboard. You always flew on Saturdays.

And you know, as I sit here stunned I can't help but remember how I met you, through Jorge Millan, who first brought you to the Directorio meetings.

I remember so many things, little brother. And everything is so recent that it hardly seems a memory. But I see you now, your glasses, your perennial smile, your endless questions about Cuba, your creative mind, your boundless imagination.

I remember a 23 year old man who worked and studied hard to make a future for himself, and who dedicated all of his spare time to trying to do something for a homeland he never knew. You were always there. Either producing the short wave radio programs for Cuban youth on the island, or flying

over the Florida straits looking for rafters, or going to Latin America seeking solidarity for the cause of Cuba's freedom.



Mario de la Peña (1971 - 1996)

And I remember instances, semblances of your spirit that you offered me: lunch in Managua in December when you told me, "I don't fight because of hate. I don't fight against anyone in particular. The enemy is injustice." And a conversation you had with someone who tried to convince you to cease your activities telling you that you were not even born in Cuba. You responded: "Yeah, I'm Cuban-American but the half that's in trouble is the Cuban one, and I have to do something about it."

The remembrance that stabs me now is the radio program that we did shortly after you flew over Havana in July 1995 flotilla. I asked you to send a message to Cuban pilots who could be sent to

knock you down. What did you tell them? "I understand that you belong to a totalitarian army. So if you receive orders to shoot me. Shoot. That's between you and your conscience. I know why I'm here. Do you?"

It seems like only a moment ago when we were together, talking, sharing, laughing. Discussing the non-violent convictions that flowed so easily from your gentle soul.

I remember you, little brother, and I cry. Not for you, or Carlos, or Pablo, or Armando, because the Kingdom of Heaven is assured for those who hunger and thirst for justice, but for us. Because we are deprived of your dreams and smiles and hope and faith.

Mario, Carlos, Armando, Pablo: the world will be a darker place without you. But someday we will find each other again. Someday when Cuba is free. You will be the smile of freedom that our people will share, The sweet nectar of justice that we'll drink, the dignified cadence that will usher forth the birth of a new republic, the breeze that will caress our liberated flag. Until then, little brother, remember me. And help me with all your might so that I may not hate those who murdered you, but rather the cruel and vicious system that spawned them.