

ENCOUNTERS

By Angel Rañon

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Meeting someone that you have known for many years in a place that you didn't expect, can give you a feeling that you leaves you wondering if there is a place on this earth that it can't happen. This is something that has happened to me on a number of occasions.

On my first trip to New York City in 1946 I had stayed in a hotel just off Times Square. While exploring my surroundings I got hungry and went in to restaurant that seemed to be nice. No sooner than I walked in I encountered a friend from Tampa. He was Julio Pelaez, a city councilman from Ybor City. Not only that but the bartender, Mario Nuñez, was also from Tampa .I went to the newsstand at Times Square where one can buy the newspaper from almost any city in the United States. While I was waiting for my turn, the person in front of me asked for the Tampa Tribune. I though I recognized the voice, sure enough it was a classmate from junior high school who was now living in New York. My thoughts were that New York City wasn't such a big place after all.

The second time that I recollect happened on another vacation trip to Brooklyn. My wife Eusebia and I were going to spend two weeks visiting her parents. While planning our trip we decided to take a somewhat out of the way route to see some of the country that we had never seen. We decided that it would be nice to travel north through the Smokey Mountains and on to the Shenandoah Valley, through Washington, D.C. and on to Brooklyn.

Our first stop for the night would be in Marietta, Georgia. We would travel by car on U. S. highway 41 to Marietta. We located a motel on the highway that we liked, settled in, went to ask the attendant about a good restaurant to have dinner. We were told that there was one within walking distance and that it was very good. We walked over, went in and sat down. The waitress that was to serve us brought us our menus and we started looking at the items that were offered. Much to our surprise, most of the items could be found in any restaurant in Ybor City or West Tampa. We ordered, ate and left wondering how such a place existed in Marietta. The following morning, before continuing on or trip, we returned to the restaurant for breakfast. I was looking towards the door to the kitchen when it opened and a familiar place appeared at the door. The name of the restaurant was "The Trio", owned by three former Tampa residents that I knew, Joe Sanchez, Sancho Fernández and Joe Fernández. Needless to say, we didn't get started on the trip that day as early as we expected.

While looking at the sights on Times Square one evening I bumped into Mauricio Torres who was the father of three of my neighbors. We didn't know each other very well but we were happy to for the encounter. Also, in Times Square, I met Frank Grasso, a Tampa dance orchestra, leader and a young man whose name was

Louis Torre who sang with Frank Grasso's orchestra once in a while. Louis served in Europe during WWII, married a young lady there, and decided to live in his wife's country.

On a trip to Spain, my wife Eusebia and I were crossing a wide boulevard and I thought that I recognized an elderly couple and a young man walking toward us. It turned out that the couple was a friend of the family that lived in Key West and visited my parents whenever they were in Tampa. The young man was their godchild and one of my many first cousins that I had never met and was working in Madrid with telephone Company.

Another encounter happened in Colorado. My son Carlos and his family were visiting my daughter-in-law's brothers who lived near Aspen. They had invited me to go with them. We had traveled around the area taking-in some of the sights and stopped at Steamboat Springs for lunch. The restaurant had two dining rooms, separated by a wide hall. No sooner than we had sat down I heard someone from the other dining room calling for Mr. Rañón. I didn't think that there were many Rañóns in Steamboat Springs so I suspected that someone was calling for me. I looked. It was Keenan Knopke, the son of the owner of the cemetery "Garden of Memories" on Lake Avenue in East Tampa. Our company had done quite a bit of construction at the cemetery for the Knopkes.

On another trip to Spain, we were visiting the Alhambra in Granada, where I ran into the cashier for the then "Las Novedades Restaurant" in Ybor City. I don't remember her name and I doubt that I ever will. On this trip, we were having some refreshments at a sidewalk café in Madrid when Clemente Ochoa, a singer in the Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City, walked by our table. I called out to him and invited him to join us, he did and we had a nice time reminiscing. Clemente had lived in an apartment rented from my mother, Ramona, in Tampa..

On one occasion I was at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport, waiting in line to get my boarding pass when I heard a voice behind me that I thought I recognized. I turned around to look and sure enough it was who I thought, Dr. Thomas Mawn, the urologist that had performed prostate surgery on me. On another, my wife and I were on our way to Spain by way of Miami, as we waited for our departure I bumped into Jesus García a junior high school classmate that I had not seen since then. He was also going to Spain on our flight. I would not see him again for several years until we met at a restaurant in West Tampa. On yet another trip to Spain, we were waiting to board our flight in Atlanta when I was called to the flight clerk's desk. I was told, a gentleman from Tampa, who was living in Atlanta with his daughter, was also on our flight wanted to speak to me. It was Antonio García, a long time friend from Tampa. I haven't seen him since.

As I travel to other places I now expect to meet other friends who are either coming or going to where I am going or I have been.