Images of Cuba: Candid moments from Havana, where the residents proved to be eager models.

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In the late winter and early spring of 2000, the Maine Photographic Workshops, one of the country's oldest and most respected photography schools, began offering short courses in Cuba. Like other American-based educational ventures to Cuba, these workshops are sanctioned by both the U.S. and Cuban governments and thus serve the dual purpose of infusing dollars into Castro's bleeding economy while offering Americans a legal way to sample the fruits of that forbidden island.

In the workshops, professional and experienced amateur photographers work in small groups under the supervision of internationally recognized master photographers. The aim is to build an archive of images documenting Cuba at this particular juncture in history. These images will be stored in both Cuba and Maine, where they will be available for research.

Last March, during Furman's spring break, I participated in a workshop taught by Ernesto Bazan, an Italian who now lives in Cuba with his native-born wife and twin sons. In addition to taking on assignments for international magazines, Bazan has published several books of his photographs and is presently documenting Cuba. Each morning he would send the 14 members of his class out to shoot, and at the end of the day he would review and critique our images from the previous day.

In my eight days in Cuba, all spent in Havana except when I took an afternoon excursion to visit...
Hemingway's villa, Finca Vigia, and Cojimar, the village where *The Old Man and the Sea* is set, I shot about 35 rolls of film. I concentrated entirely on people — on the street, in the markets, in their homes.

Almost all of the people I photographed were eager or at least willing to cooperate. (Occasionally I did hear “one dollar” in response to my request to photograph.) Some of this cooperation I attribute to the Cuban people’s natural warmth and gregariousness. But because film is almost impossible to come by in Cuba and would be too expensive for many Cubans if it were readily available, some of this eagerness was most likely the result of a dearth of opportunity to be photographed.

A camera could generate real excitement, not just among children, but among adults as well. One woman wanted to be photographed holding the receiver of her new telephone to her ear; a hospital orderly wanted to be photographed drawing blood from a patient’s arm. I was constantly having to work around toothy grins or stiff poses. Even so, with patience and good luck, I was able to capture some candid moments.

I will return to Cuba during this year’s spring break and will photograph both in Havana and in the tobacco farming area. In the meantime, here is a small sample of my images from that fascinating country.

— Willard Pate

The author/photographer has taught English at Furman since 1964.