

CHAPTER XVI

In the summer of 1951 several of us sent our wives and children to the mainland to visit with their families. Ford Mason had set up a gum ball plant in Ponce to be near the supply of local sugar used in making his gum balls. He had set up a distribution system for his gum dispensers by having service clubs, such as Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, etc., place the machines for which they shared in a percentage of the revenue the machines produced. His motto, which was applied on all machines, was "Chew For Charity."

Mason had a private Douglas DC3 which he had outfitted like the interior of yacht on the inside and used for his personal travel between the island and the mainland. The plane had a large painting of a gum ball machine on each side of the fuselage and the words "Chew For Charity." Charlie Powers, his pilot, did double duty as production control manager at the plant when not flying. When Mason found out we were planning to send our families north he offered to fly them free to Miami. They all left early one morning and Charlie let Richy, who was ten years old at the time fly the plane most of the way to Miami. Actually I think he probably had it on autopilot and Richy thought he was flying it. From Miami each family made their own travel arrangements to their respective destinations.

In the meantime, while our families were gone, we fellows were left to our own devices or I should say vices. We did a lot of bar hopping and got into all kinds of trouble including Joe Owens who got shot in the stomach by a jealous Ponce attorney who thought Joe

was getting too familiar with his mistress. Joe was captain of the Ponce Cement Works ship used to haul cement to the mainland. He survived his wounds and finally got a \$25,000 settlement out of the attorney who was never prosecuted because under Puerto Rican law this incident was considered a crime of passion.

One Sunday morning during this time four of us were heading up to Cuamo Springs for a little extra curricula activity with Bill Bailey driving. The other two occupants of the car were Jim Bain and Mitch Malian. We had taken the usual precautions of fortifying ourselves with several sticks of rum (a stick was four ounces of rum in a little paper cup and sold for 20 cents) and as we went down Atoche Street, the main drag out of town, Bill rammed a cart being pulled by a native who was moving and had his entire possessions on the cart, which was not a lot. The left front fender of Bill's car caught the corner of a bed spring hanging over the edge of the cart and as the spring spun around it dumped everything in the street.

A large crowd gathered immediately and they were all screaming "Coche, Coche," which means accident. Some of the poor guys furniture was broken and the fender of Bill's car was dented. The guy was rightfully indignant threatening to call the police. Three of us, Bill, Jim and I, quickly ushered the fellow into a "Colmado" (little store) on the nearby corner and bought him three bottles of rum while Mitch stayed behind to protect the car. The potential problem was thus settled on the spot to the satisfaction of everyone.

Colliers magazine ran a feature story on the industrial development efforts in Puerto Rico and sent a team of writers and photographers to cover the story. Joyce de Puerto Rico was one of the operations they chose to write about and a reporter and photographer spent the better part of a day at our plant. As a result, a color photo of myself and Jake appeared in the magazine along with a story on our operation illustrated with some other photos.

No sooner had our families returned than disaster struck in Pasadena. It was on a Monday morning and Jake came running into my office with a copy of El Mundo, the main news paper on the island, and showed me a front page photo of the Joyce plant in Pasadena going up in flames. The plant had been totally destroyed over the weekend including all of the records, even those in the fireproof vault.

For the next few months I made several round trips to Pasadena, Columbus and Xenia, Ohio, and Manchester, New Hampshire where Joyce had subsidiary plants. I gathered all the records I could get my hands on including those in Puerto Rico and we were able, with the help of our suppliers and customers, to reconstruct most of the recent business transactions while Joyce set up operations in a temporary building in Pasadena. We did not realize it at the time but the stage had been set for the eventual demise of the Joyce Shoe Company.

I had bought a 1950 Buick Roadmaster and kept it parked in the yard back of the house on El Vigia under a pair of Flamboyant trees. About 9:00 p.m. one night during a full moon, I heard the sound of breaking glass and looked out to see a couple of guys trying to break into the car. They were fiddling with the lock inside the car trying to get it open. I grabbed my 410 shot gun that was filled with bird shot and fired over their heads. The sound of the pellets tearing through the tree leaves right above their heads was enough to scare them away and we never had anymore of that sort of thing.

In addition to the previously mentioned hurricane we also went through a civil uprising in an attempt to overthrow the government. The uprising was led by Albiso Compos and included an attempt on President Truman's life in the attack on Blair House in Washington. A number of public officials were shot to death on the island, including a policeman who was shot dead right outside the window of my office at the shoe plant.

The insurgents captured a small town named Jailasco up in the mountains about 20 miles from Ponce. They burned the post office and police station and killed the postmaster and the chief of police. As a result the bad guys had control of the town. The National Guard stationed in San Juan got all their tanks out and headed for the besieged town.

The Publisher of EL Mundo asked me to fly a photographer up to the place to get pictures of what was going on. I agreed and the photographer and I took the Civil Air Patrol Piper L4 observation plane that the Airforce had assigned to me and headed for Jailasco. The little silver plane had the Airforce insignia markings on it but was unarmed and we had no guns on our person. We passed the parade of tanks on the way up to the town and could see the smoke, from the many burning buildings, rising ahead of us. The insurgents had set fire to most of the town. As I buzzed the town at a low level so my passenger could get some good photos, people on the ground began firing at us with rifles. I went around and made a second lower pass and everyone scrambled for safety evidently thinking we were going to bomb them. We then got the hell out of there without suffering any bullet holes in the plane. I think the guys on the ground were panic stricken to the point they could not aim their rifles accurately.

About an hour after we left Jailasco the National Guard tanks arrived on the scene and restored order. The photos we took that day appeared on the front page of El Mundo and a number of mainland newspapers as the fracas had captured national attention.

Then there was the saga of Correa Cotto, a chicken thief who frightened half the population of Ponce. He had been put in jail for stealing two chickens but managed to escape and armed with a machete, went on a rampage that included cutting up a couple of the natives. A massive manhunt was orga-

nized and based on reports of his sightings he must have been in a number of different places at the same time. After several days, during which time some people were afraid to venture outside their houses, Correa was reported to be holed up in a sugarcane field on the outskirts of Ponce. Once again the publisher of El Mundo asked me to fly a photographer over the cane field to get pictures of any action that might take place.

As we flew over the cane the police set fire to the field with the idea of flushing him out. We flew around for about 30 minutes but could not spot Correa so returned to the airstrip without anything to show for our effort. However, a couple of hours later, Correa came running out of the cane field and face to face with a policeman who promptly fainted from fright. Correa grabbed the officer's gun and started down a service road where he ran into a bevy of cops who drilled some 15 holes into him with their 45's. His body was then put in the back of a pickup truck and paraded around town for the rest of the day. He was just a little squirt, about five foot one and not over 110 pounds.

On one of the religious holidays, the townsfolk decided to have a parade down the main street of Ponce. I think it was Carnival Week but I'm not sure of that. Anyway I had bought a lot of confetti and paper streamers for the event and then borrowed a friend's plane, an Ercoupe, and with Richy aboard we flew at rooftop level down the main drag as he threw the confetti and streamers out of the plane.

The Virgin Islands are only some 80 miles from Puerto Rico and we made several trips over there to visit St Thomas, a U.S. duty free port where there were all sorts of bargains in Dresden China, Irish Linens and imported liquors. I also used the Civil Air Patrol plane on several search and rescue missions looking for missing boaters. I held the rank of Major and was Commanding Officer of the Ponce Squadron of the Puerto Rican Wing of the CAP. On one of our squadron training missions with a CAP Cadet as crew member we had

to locate a simulated crash site up in the mountains and drop supplies by parachute to the people on the ground. Our dummy package landed about twenty feet from the target and for that I received a letter of commendation.

One Sunday morning as Virginia and I with the children were on our way to a beach picnic at Guayanica a fellow on a bicycle came down a hill and plowed into the side of our car. He must have been going at least 35 MPH as the hill was very steep. He flew off the bike and went head first into the car knocking him unconscious and putting a big dent in the right hand rear door of the car. The children were frightened and screaming which did not help matters. Someone called an ambulance and they got the guy to the hospital while I went to the police station to file a report. The police then went to the hospital to check on the guy only to find out that he had regained consciousness and bolted out of the hospital. No one knew his name or where he lived and that was the last I ever heard of it. I don't blame him for taking off when he found out where he was because the public hospitals left a lot to be desired.

Mentally disturbed crazy people ran loose around town and were never institutionalized unless they were a danger to the public. One woman used to go around town gnawing on telephone poles while another would go into the Cathedral and run down the aisles while lighting paper matches and throwing them in the air. Then there was George Washington, a tall black man who dressed in bib overalls and had American flags sticking out of all his pockets. He would stand on street corners making nonsensical speeches and waving a large flag he carried with him. He claimed he was George Washington.

One morning I could not get the car started and had my head under the hood checking to see if I could find any loose wires or other trouble. George Washington snuck up behind me and suddenly started yelling

out one of his speeches which startled me and caused me to jump up and hit my head on the hood. He just laughed and continued with his speech as if nothing had happened. I used to talk to him on occasion and we sort of became friends. He was obviously well educated and harmless, but I could never find out much about him as he was living in a dream world of his own.



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