

“My life was rather ordinary until I ended up in solitary confinement in a Cuban prison, was put in a mansion, expected to be shot by a firing squad, got thrown back into prison and started a riot, before being freed for telling my first lie.” —
Gordon Hesse

Cuban Blues – A Memoir of Captivity & Resurrection

In 1973 I was a deckhand on a derelict shrimp boat that accidentally entered Cuban waters and was overtaken, seized and searched by the crew of a Cuban gunboat. As they trained .55 caliber machine guns on us, the Cuban's found guns, knives, money, U.S. military surplus, and an empty explosives case. They also knew that something was thrown overboard.

We had all the earmarks of a paramilitary operation, and we were taken ashore for questioning in a villa before being thrown into solitary confinement in a KGB-designed prison. Thus began nearly a year of captivity in isolation, in a mansion and in two colonial-era castles, complete with moat and dungeons. We were placed in an immense cell that held held 425 inmates. Our cellmates included two dozen Americans—political radicals, hijackers, a joyriding sailor and a bunch of *marijuaneros* and political prisoners.

After lists of grievances, a riot, a trial in Military Tribunal *Numero Uno*, threats of 26 years incarceration and two hunger strikes, we were deported.

Returning to the U.S.A. was as if I had died and a new person was reborn. Now, as more attention is likely to be turned to Cuba, with the imminent change in political leadership, this account is likely to reverberate with those for whom Cuba is an island of intrigue, loss and curiosity.