

Honeymoon in Havana

By Molly Rossi, Grassland Middle School, Franklin, Tenn.

*On Jan. 1, 1959, **revolutionary**¹ leader Fidel Castro and his rebel soldiers seized control of Cuba, **ousting**² dictator Fulgencio Batista. Castro turned the small island nation into a communist state, with all property belonging to the government. Molly Rossi interviewed her grandmother, Monica Rossi, who was traveling in Cuba during the revolt.*

On December 28, 1958, my grandparents, Monica and Frank Rossi, left for their honeymoon in Cuba. Little did the newlyweds know that Cuba was at the height of its most violent revolt in history and that the government was about to fall. Ah, young love!

I interviewed my grandmother. These are her answers from a firsthand point of view:

"We landed in Havana, Cuba's capital. When we got off the plane, no one was very helpful. We paid little attention, though, because we were very excited.

"On New Year's Eve, we went to the most popular nightclub in Cuba, the Tropicana. It was great. Your grandpa and I were so crazy back then; we even got onstage and started a conga dance. At about 2 a.m., we decided to go back to our hotel. When we stepped outside, the street—which was usually lined with cabs—was deserted. I didn't yet know what was beginning to happen, but I knew something wasn't right.

"When I got in bed that night, I heard lots of loud explosions. Since it was New Year's Eve, I thought they were fireworks, so I said, 'These Cubans sure know how to celebrate!' Little did we know that these noises were actually cannonball fires and gunshots. The revolution had started.

"The next morning, your grandfather called the front desk and asked about sightseeing. The concierge said in a panicked tone, 'Señor, this

1 revolutionary: bringing about a big change

2 ousting: forcing out

is not a good day to go sightseeing. The entire Cuban government has fallen, and the country is in a revolt!’

"We decided to go to brunch at another hotel. As we were walking there, the streets were becoming very crowded. The closer we got to the center of town, the more excitement we saw. There were lots of people crammed into tiny cars.

"There were people dancing, and everyone was singing, and lots of people were waving flags. I took out my camera to take a picture. As I did, your grandfather grabbed my arm and started running down the sidewalk with me as fast as he could. Finally I stopped him and asked what we were doing. He said, 'Mona, when you lifted your camera, a Cuban man took out his gun and pointed it at your head!' We decided that we had better get back to the hotel. In our room, we listened to the radio. Of course, it was in Spanish. All I could understand was that Batista had left Cuba.

"In the morning a nervous man from the U.S. Embassy came to the hotel. He told us that the **U.S. Embassy**³ was trying to negotiate with the various groups involved with the Cuban revolution to get us out safely. The next morning we took a ship to Key West, Florida. I was sad that it had come to the point that it was too dangerous for us to stay."

Conclusion: I have learned so much from this opportunity to really talk to my grandmother about her life. I encourage all kids to take any chance they get to spend time with their grandparents. You never know—I mean, it could be cool.

³ **U.S. Embassy:** the Ambassador and his or her staff who represent the United States in a foreign country

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did Monica and Frank Rossi go to Cuba?

- A They wanted to join the revolt.
- B They went for their honeymoon.
- C They wanted to learn about Cuba.
- D The couple was invited by relatives.

2. Being in Cuba during a revolt affected Monica and Frank Rossi's experience there. All of the following were effects EXCEPT

- A they were not able to go sightseeing
- B the U.S. Embassy had to get them out safely
- C they learned how to speak Spanish fluently
- D a man pointed a gun at Monica's head

3. Why did the author include the sixth paragraph ("When I got in bed....The revolution had started.") in the article?

- A to persuade other people to travel to Cuba's capital
- B to describe how nervous the couple was during the revolt
- C to explain how Americans celebrate New Year's Eve
- D to show how unaware the couple was of the danger

4. Read this sentence from the passage: "On Jan. 1, 1959, revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and his rebel soldiers seized control of Cuba, ousting dictator Fulgencio Batista."

In this sentence, the word **dictator** means

- A a person who rules with absolute power
- B someone with high standards and values
- C a long-lost friend or family member
- D an admired government official

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A how soldiers prepared to oust dictator Fulgencio Batista
- B why Fidel Castro and his soldiers seized control of Cuba
- C Monica Rossi's experience during the Cuban revolt
- D the relationship between Monica and Frank Rossi

6. What is the capital of Cuba?

7. Why, do you think, were the streets deserted when the couple left the nightclub? How do you know?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Molly Rossi interviewed her grandmother, Monica Rossi, _____ learn about her life.

- A for
- B or
- C and
- D to

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Monica and Frank Rossi were dancing in a nightclub in Cuba at the start of a violent revolt.

Who? _____

(were doing) What? _____

Where? _____

When? at the start of a violent revolt

10. **Vocabulary Word:** ousting: forcing out.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
