

De la Cova's library breathes history, Cuban roots

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Antonio de la Cova lives among books.

His library includes four solid shelves of books on Cuban history. On the library wall is a photograph of the Dauntless, a ship that carried de la Cova's maternal grandfather — along with Puerto Rican poet Pachín Marín — from Savannah, Ga., to Cuba where they joined the fight against Spanish oppression.

Pachín Marín didn't survive; de la Cova's grandfather did. He was a colonel in the revolutionary army when the war ended; and he left a symbol for de la Cova.

The likeness is clear in a photo of de la Cova when he was arrested in Miami in 1976 for anti-Castro terrorism. Today, at 37, the physical likeness is muted by de la Cova's abundant beard.

De la Cova's library also includes what he calls his "intelligence" section, a bookcase crammed with volumes on spies, intelligence-gathering organizations and related material. It may be the single best collection of its kind in Puerto Rico; it goes well with a man who ferrets out the identities of those he suspects are serving Cuban President Fidel Castro.

This penchant has brought him into conflict with the government both here and in Miami, where in 1976 he was convicted of conspiracy to bomb a bookstore.

Before his conviction, de la Cova contributed to "Libertad," whose publisher, Rolando Masferrer, was



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blown to bits in 1982. Masferrer is best remembered not for his "Tigres," a private army that terrorized Santiago in 1957-58 as they hunted down people suspected of aiding Fidel Castro's guerrillas in the nearby Sierra Maestra.

De la Cova, asked for his opinion of Masferrer, said the man "was partly hype."

But de la Cova's recollections of Cuba deal with the disruption of family that came with the departure of his father, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, his educator mother and their children for Miami in the early 1960s. The exodus, the loss of regular contact with his grandparents, his cousins and other relatives, seared De La Cova. The diaspora didn't prove too difficult, economically, but the family separation "was a strain" on his parents.

"We [the children] knew the cause of this was Communism," he said.

After a time in Miami the family shifted to Memphis, and then to Louisville, and it was in these two cities that de la Cova spent his boyhood. It was, as he tells it, a very typical boyhood. "I was a Boy Scout. I read Dick Tracy and Li'l Abner. Loved apple pie," he said.

Although the family was "apolitical," and his upbringing was far from the fierce and inbred world of Miami's Little Havana, de la Cova reached college age with his mind firmly set against communism and Castro. "My parents did not preach any type of politics . . . but there was a very strong sense of anti-communism in my family."

Once the family returned to Florida and de la Cova enrolled at Florida Atlantic University, where he "saw the activities of pro-Castro elements," this "dormant" anti-Communism would flare into activism. He did not go directly from school into the underground, however. First, after graduation, he did a six-month stint in the U.S. Army. He didn't mind the discipline, (he had been in Loyola military school back in Cuba), but his asthma

reacted badly. Six months after entering the Army he was released with a medical discharge.

De la Cova turned to teaching, history and Spanish. Also, he enrolled in Miami University for a master's degree in history. Extra-curricular activity included shadowing supposed pro-Castro elements, and then direct action when he and his associates discovered a book store that he called a front for Castro's DGI (*Division General de Inteligencia*).

While de la Cova and his associates were tracking suspected Castro agents, however, a police informant kept the authorities advised on the budding conspiracy to bomb the bookstore. Police agents were waiting when, on May 7, 1976, de la Cova walked toward the store, sack in hand.

Inside the sack police found a potentially lethal pipe bomb, dynamite wrapped around a pipe with a black powder fuse, according to the Miami News.

That arrest represented the police's first success in stopping bombings in the Cuban community, and de la Cova feels the courts deliberately made an example of him. He drew 15 years on federal charges, and 55 years on Florida state charges.

In the 6½ years he spend behind bars before winning parole, de la Cova used his time to pelt news media with anti-Castro articles. Gloria Gil, an anti-Castro editor here, gave the stories good play. Their correspondence led to his coming to Puerto Rico after release from prison, and his marriage to Gil, then a widow.

Asked why he wanted to bomb the bookstore, instead of debating with its owners, de la Cova said:

"There was a lot of denunciation. These people were laughing it off. They weren't taking it very serious. So we got our message across to them more seriously; that they were backing a regime that is responsible for the death, for the suffering of thousands of people."