One day last May, I received a call from Don Holding, a long time journalist and expert on the Caribbean and Latin America at the Miami Herald. He asked me if I remembered "I said no. His name does not ring a bell." He replied that I must have known him, as he was active in the CIA in Miami in the early 1960's. He then told me the reason for a call. The day before he had received a call from ??, now retired and living on a farm in North Carolina. He asked Don if he ever heard of something called "Operation Pedro Pan." He had received a call from the CIA at Langley. Their computers had no record. I began to laugh. I told Don that I had been expecting this call since first a professor at Depaul University, Dr. de Torres had requested from the CIA the release of all documents relating to Operation Pedro Pan under the US Freedom of Information Act. The name had never been used, except in conversation by the Catholic Welfare Bureau. It had appeared in print in an article in the Miami Herald in March 1962. The next reference was in a Reader's Digest article in February 1988. The name was coined by Ralph Renick, longtime anchor man on Wometco Channel 4 at a time when we had an understanding with the local media that it was not in the best interests of the parents in Cuba to draw attention to what was being done to help Cuban parents provide a safe haven in the US for their children. The last thing we wanted in Operation Pedro Pan was publicity. Indeed, it was the refusal of the Cleveland Plain Dealer to honor this understanding that led the Secretary of U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Abe Ribicoff and myself to authorize the first press release on March 7 1962. A Plain Dealer reporter had learned about the program from neighbors who were a foster family for unaccompanied Cuban children. When he enquired about what such children were doing in Cleveland, he was referred back to me in Miami. His editor was adamant. All my appeals for confidentiality for the parents in Cuba fell on deaf ears. The fifteen months long wall of secrecy was broken.

These facts are important because some revisionist historians and commentators both in the U.S. the U.K and Cuba have engaged in an on going campaign portray Operation Pedro Pan (not Peter Pan) as a dirty tricks campaign conceived by the CIA to mislead Cuban families and panic them into sending their children abroad. If there was such a plan, it would seem strange that it should be wrapped in complete secrecy for some sixteen months and then largely escape the scrutiny of the media in the US and the Castro regime until some thirty years later. The only effort by the U.S Government to use the program for propaganda purposes was a thirty minute documentary, entitled "The Lost Apple". It was produced by the US Information Agency and directed by David Susskind. By the time it was released in 1963 the program had come to an end with the October Missile Crisis.
The first question I wish to deal with today is: Was the CIA involved in Operation Pedro Pan? The BBC in London, in a recent radio program said that I was less than forthcoming. My answer to their question was:...........

It is interesting that the comment of the Castro regime ?? is that the CIA was not involved in the early stages, but took it over after the Bay of Pigs. This seems to be based on the testimonies of Mongro ands Polita Grau at their trial in 1964??

The second question to be dealt with is "When and what did the Castro Regime know about Operation Pedro Pan? Here again the record is not clear. According to Juventud Rebelde (dates), the exodus of an unusual number of unaccompanied children was noticed by Cuban Emigration officials on December 26, 1960. In the 2000 Cuban published book Operation Peter Pan sic, it would seem that it was much later that it was noted. In his unpublished manuscript, ??? , indicates that it was not really noticed until.???

As far as the Catholic Welfare Bureau and I myself are concerned, the record is very clear as to how and when the Cuban Children's Program and Operation Pedro Pan came into being. The chronology as published in the Journal Of Inter American Studies and World Affairs ?? is the story of what actually occurred. At no time did I have any contacts with the CIA. My contacts were with Mr. Voorheis, the personal representative of President Eisenhower and Frank Auerbach, head of the Visa Section of the U.S Department of State. After the inauguration of President Kennedy on Jan 20, 1961, the contact person of the care of Cuban children in the US without the care and protection of their parents was the Secretary of the U.S Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Mr. Abraham Ribicoff. My ongoing contact in the U.S. Department of State, was John Crimmins, head of the Cuban Desk.

My interest in unaccompanied Cuban children began in November 1960, when an unaccompanied Cuban teenager was brought to my office. He had been sent to Miami by his parents, who expected their relatives to care for him. They were in such desperate a situation themselves that they asked the Church to help. I saw this request as a wakeup call. This teenager could be the first of many requesting care.

As director of Catholic Charities in Miami, a position which I had held since 1955, I was responsible for providing foster care for children in the Diocese who had lost the care and protection of their families. However, funds for this purpose were very limited and not readily available from either Church or State sources. I foresaw that as soon as CWB began to accept unaccompanied Cuban children, we would be swamped with requests and have no resources. I took a chance and arranged for some emergency care for Pedro Menendez.