



# DRSEA INFORMER

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***Aventuras En Paraíso (Adventures In Paradise)*** – The Dominican Republic is undeniably a tropical paradise, but it is also a developing nation, which lends itself for adventures, experiences that are enhanced by the things that make the Dominican unique. What started out one morning as a breakfast meeting turned into an unexpected adventure through areas of this country that are remote and heretofore unknown to me.

My friend Paco teaches English at a school in Santo Domingo, a school I have visited several times. Both Paco and I are very interested in the education of young people in the Dominican Republic, so when he mentioned that there was a new school looking for coordinators to help in recruiting students and teachers, I saw it as an opportunity to expand my networking for the DRSEA while maybe making a little money to stretch my budget. Couldn't hurt, right?

We were to meet Professor Charley, as we have come to call him, at 7:30 a.m. at a local restaurant to discuss our involvement, but when Paco and I arrived, Charley was ready to hustle us off to another destination. Professor Charley immediately reminded me of Oil Can Harry, slick in speech as he slipped from English, to the French of his native Haiti, and then to Spanish, which he spoke at all too fast a clip, even in a country where Spanish is machine gunned. Professor Charley wore a bright red plaid shirt, festooning it with one of those ties Cliff Huxtable's kids always gave him for Father's Day.



Professor Charley?

We needed to go to La Guázuma, Professor Charley said, about 90 minutes away. I assumed he had a car waiting until he said we had to catch the *gua gua*. Before I continue, allow me to explain the *gua gua* and other unique forms of Dominican public transportation, which can only be described as organized chaos that is as much a part of the adventure as the food, drink and music of the country.

First, there are the *publicos*, a inexpensive type of unofficial taxi that ferry people around from point to point; often one car is loaded beyond capacity with six or seven passengers, each paying a modest fair to occupy the cramped vehicle. They are a cheap alternative to private taxis.

There are also the *motoconchos*, motorcycles or scooters where you toss caution to the wind, hop on the back, and scoot off to your destination. Helmets are not an option and riders need to remember that the most treated emergency room injury involves these vehicles.

And then there are the *gua guas*, which originate at certain regular spots and, assuming there is room, can be flagged down just about anywhere. They usually run from one township to another and you may then have to transfer to another *gua gua* to go further on.

This particular morning we took one *gua gua* from the Zona Colonial, where I live, to the outskirts of Santo Domingo. Many of the *gua guas* are vans, some with side doors – or not, some with windows – or not, and some with seats – or not. From the back, you pass up \$15 pesos to the driver, who will provide change if needed and pass it back, passenger to passenger.

On the fringe of Santo Domingo, we catch another *gua gua*, this time a four-door pickup that traverses from small town to small town, through winding roads, many that are simply crushed gravel and full of holes and that must be dodged along with the assorted dogs, cats, chickens and other animals. It gives “Keep your eyes on the road,” a whole new meaning. Two hours later, after seeing vast new terrains that included crossing a road where a stream literally flowed over it, we get to the school in La Guázuma, which a Google search tells me has 5,500 residents within its seven kilometer radius at the base of a small mountain range. Along the way we stop to pick up other passengers, including one who loads a bunch of coconuts onto the flatbed, apparently on his way to sell his wares.

The school is modest by any standard, a collection of three or four cottages and a basketball court. We ask to go to the bathroom and are taken to a shed with a hole in the concrete floor. I see students with book bags in the classroom, but oddly, no books are in sight. Tattered window shades filter sunlight onto the bare concrete floors. There are computers in some administrative offices, but they sit idle as a woman hammers on a technological dinosaur – the typewriter.

Professor Charley introduces Paco and me to a classrooms as “Dr. Paco and Dr. Charles,” who have *agreed* to serve as counselors for the program. I have trouble keeping up with his rapid banter in Spanish, but the gist is that each student would pay \$1,500 pesos – about \$30 – to go to the special school that is opening. I am uneasy with his pitch and feel like I am being pimped to sell the program; it is obvious these are not kids who have a lot of financial means meaning even 30 bucks is extreme.

Within about half an hour we are headed back to Santo Domingo, reversing course along the broken roads, fording streams, climbing hills and seeing countryside that I imagine has changed little in 100 years. I see two men swimming naked in a creek and an immense animal in the water nearby, so huge that my mind immediately thinks “hippopotamus” before I remember that the hippo is not indigenous to the Dominican Republic. It turns out to be a monstrous pig.

In Santo Domingo we transfer to another *gua gua* and get back to our neighborhood. At first I feel I have wasted much of the day, but I remember the words of the Greek playwright Aeschylus who said, “It is always in season for old men to learn.” My education in the Dominican Republic is an ongoing ritual; I learn more about the country and about myself on a daily basis. One thing I have learned about is the vast dichotomy of education here. I have seen the best the country can offer and I have seen it at the other end of the scale, elementary at best, and the need for the DRSEA becomes even clearer.

I am also seeing the vastness of this country, and the internal diversity of the people and the terrain, and how the populace lives within that diversity of mountains and beach, city, suburban and rural. I appreciate it all.



***Juan Casimiro Es Una Persona Especial (Juan Casimiro is a special person)*** – Meet the DRSEA’s newest Board of Trustees member. Juan P. Casimiro began his career as an educator in 1987 after closing his first business in New York City. Now with over 20 years of experience as a public speaker, entrepreneur, educator, coach and mentor, Juan specializes in building individual and organizational strength from within. His teaching of entrepreneurship, financial literacy, one-on-one coaching sessions, career/personal development programs, and non-profit organization development workshops are known for the immediate enthusiasm they generate and the long-term benefits that flow from them.

Throughout his 20-year career, Mr. Casimiro has kept active and consistently creating and delivering effective courses and programs throughout the USA, Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. He served as a partner and/or founder of several businesses, including: Ascend Youth Entrepreneurship International, YoungBiz and EDGE. Mr. Casimiro serves as President of the Casimiro Foundation, an organization that helps fund college scholarships and social ventures for youth and marginalized communities in developing nations.

In addition to the Casimiro Foundation, he is an active board member of the Dominican American National Foundation in Florida and Co-Founder of Alpha Psi Lambda. He is also a partner/volunteer for: Miami Dade Public Schools, National Academy Foundation, Broward County Schools Partner Program and AOIT. Previous directorship roles include New York’s Empowerment Zone, Credit Where Credit is Due, Inc., and the Dominican American National Roundtable.

Along with being a guest lecturer/trainer at Columbia, Harvard, Miami Dade College, FAU, and other universities, Mr. Casimiro serves as an educational consultant for various education and training organizations in the United States.

## ***“PASION POR EL BEISBOL”***

### ***“El Sueño Dominicano” (Primera Parte)***

Queridos amigos:

Hoy es un día especial para mí, pues con esta columna que dirijo hacia ustedes estoy fusionando dos de mis pasiones, el beisbol y la escritura. Y también me confirma cómo Dios de muchas maneras te presenta la oportunidad de ser feliz. Yo tengo mi propia filosofía de la felicidad, tal como pasa con todo ser humano. Si sales y haces una encuesta, preguntando a cada persona qué

es la felicidad para ella, te darás cuenta que todas las respuestas son distintas, y las similares serán respuestas muy generales, de personas que no se han hecho la pregunta internamente, que todavía ni ellos mismos saben lo que realmente los hace felices. La felicidad para mí *es hacer lo que le agrade a nuestro corazón.*

No sé si alguna vez han experimentado esa sensación de que pueden respirar hondo y que el corazón está en paz. Eso generalmente pasa cuando agradamos el corazón. En este momento estoy agradando a mi corazón, comenzando un proyecto que realmente me gusta. No sé cómo va a continuar, sólo sé que comencé y que lo estoy haciendo con todo el amor del mundo.

Vivo en un país muy especial, República Dominicana. Un país, que tal como dije hace dos días, a unos amigos en Facebook, es ÚNICO. Aquí pasan tantas cosas, que, estoy segura, no pasan en ningún país del mundo. Una de esas cosas es que cuando nace un hijo, varón, en cualquier familia, inmediatamente todos dicen o quieren que el niño sea “pelotero.”

Ese es un deseo tan arraigado en las familias de nuestro país que ya forma parte de nuestra cultura. Por tal motivo, desde pequeñitos los primeros regalos que reciben los niños son un guante, un bate y una pelota de goma. Es muy común ver a los padres jugando “pelota” con sus hijos desde que comienzan a dar sus primeros pasos. Si el padre no vive con el niño, su madre se ocupa de llevarlo al play. Esa costumbre no es exclusiva de una clase social específica, sino que quizás sea la única costumbre que escapa a las clases sociales.

Cuando los niños están más grandecitos, entonces hay que buscar una escuela de béisbol donde inscribirlos. Aquí si se establece una diferencia en clases sociales, pues no todos los niños pueden pagar una escuela. Sin embargo, muchos padres hacen el sacrificio por el futuro de su hijo. En caso de que su hijo no pueda ir a la escuela de beisbol, entonces, el niño practica en uno de los muchos improvisados “plays” que existen en nuestro país, que se acondicionan en terrenos baldíos, o en cualquier espacio de los barrios y pueblos, donde se puedan tejer los sueños de grandes y chicos. El “sueño dominicano.”



*Iris Isabel Núñez es una abogada de Santiago, fanática apasionada por muchos años con el béisbol. Su hijo juega desde pequeño, por lo que es una madre dominicana familiarizada con ese deporte.*

## **“Passion For Baseball”**

### **“The Dominican Dream” (Part I)**

Dear Friends:

Today is a very special day for me as I get to fuse two of my passions via this column, baseball and writing. It also confirms, for me, how God often provides one with so many ways of being

happy. I have my own philosophy about happiness just as we all do. If you were to survey people about what makes them happy you will discover that there are many answers and that those who give similar answers are making general statements because those people may not have taken an introspective look at what makes them happy and may not even truly know. Happiness for me is doing what pleases the heart.

I don't know if you have ever experienced that feeling of taking a deep breath and getting that sense of calm. That usually happens when you please the heart. At this moment, I am pleasing my heart, by starting a project that I truly love. I don't know how it will turn out only that I have started and am undertaking it with all the love in the world.

I live in a very special country, the Dominican Republic. A country, as I told a couple of friends on Facebook just two days ago, that is unlike any other. So many things happen here, that certainly, do not happen anywhere else in the world. One of those things is that when a son is born, regardless of the family, everyone wants that son to be a baseball player.

That is such an ingrained feeling in Dominican families that it forms part of our culture. As a result, from birth, the first gifts given to sons are a baseball glove, a bat and a baseball. It is very common to see fathers playing ball with their sons from the moment they are able to walk. If the father does not live at home, it is mom who takes the son to play ball. This custom is not exclusive to any specific social class and may actually be one of the only customs that is not specific to social class.

When sons get a little older it is time to look for a baseball academy. This is where social class begins to take shape, as not all families are able to afford such schools. Regardless, many families sacrifice for the future of their sons. If the family is not able to afford sending their son to a baseball academy parents and kids DOMINICAN DREAM will be pursued by joining one of many improvised teams that exist in our country and that play on empty dirt lots or in just about any vacant space that can be found.



*Iris Isabel Núñez is an attorney in Santiago and a passionate baseball fan for many years. Her son has played baseball since youth, which has given her extensive exposure to the game.*

***Encuesta Dice (Survey Shows)*** – Tatiana Zamora Crespo, a 20-year-old from Ecuador, always wanted to study languages and travel the world, but with five siblings and a monthly family income of \$200 – reality nearly crushed her dreams. When Tatiana graduated from high school, Children International's HOPE Scholarship, Helping Overcome Poverty through Education, paid for her first year of college. Now, Tatiana continues to study and works as an English teacher but attributes Children International with helping fulfill her dreams of an education. "This kind of scholarship helps and encourages youth to continue [their] education," said Tatiana.

In a survey of 7,785 youth like Tatiana who graduated from the Children International Youth Program, the vast majority felt CI sponsorship helped prepare them to create positive change in their communities.

- **63 percent of the graduates surveyed have more self-esteem and confidence due to Children International Youth Programs.**
- **62 percent of the graduates surveyed stayed in school longer due to Children International.**
- **57 percent of the graduates surveyed left the program with life skills.**
- **66 percent of the graduates surveyed were motivated to reach their goals.**
- **Over half of the graduates surveyed found they solved problems in their community.**

James R. Cook, president and CEO of Children International, says, “We are so proud of all our youth who show such determination and promise as they enter adulthood. They show such courage as they overcome each hurdle that poverty places in their path. Thanks to our donors, they are changing children’s lives and making the world a better place one child at a time.”

If you would like to see the results from the youth survey, please visit <http://www.children.org/YouthReportCard.asp>.

Children International’s Youth Programs have more than 135,000 members around the world. The Youth Programs provide teens from 12 to 19 years of age a positive environment in which to grow. The programs also provide youth a safe place to gather with their friends, as well as constructive activities to empower them to become leaders in their communities. Members democratically elect a youth council with the intention of solving social, cultural and economic problems.

Established in 1936, Children International is a nonprofit organization with its headquarters in Kansas City, MO. Children International’s programs benefit over 300,000 poor children and their families in 11 countries around the world, including Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Zambia and the United States. The DRSEA has partnered with Children International on a reading program for children in the Dominican Republic.

If you would like to sponsor a youth, visit [www.children.org](http://www.children.org) .

### ***Otras Noticias De Interés (Other News of Interest)***

***First Lady Making Most of Andrea Bocelli Fame*** – Dominican Republic First Lady Margarita Cedeno de Fernandez is trying to make the most of Andrea Bocelli’s popularity to fundraise for causes supported by her office. The Italian singer is scheduled to perform at the Altos de Chavon amphitheater and the First Lady reportedly bought out the 400 seats in the first row of the concert. Each ticket costs RD\$10,000. One newspaper said that several wealthy people who own villas in Casa de Campo and had planned to attend the concert were not so happy to discover that the front row seats had all sold out. Requests from the First Lady for a donation of RD\$200,000 in return for front row seats at the concert have been sent out to several companies. The First Lady’s Office runs a series of social programs that have an excellent reputation.

***Clinton Visits Haiti and Dominican Republic*** – U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently visited the island of Hispaniola making several announcements in support of education, sustainable agriculture and the fight against drug trafficking.

For Haiti, Secretary of State Clinton announced US\$287 million in aid for 2009, primarily for road building projects. She also announced "a significant contribution towards the retirement of Haiti's debt to free up money the government can use on pressing needs, as well as helping the Haitian police to fight drug traffickers. "We wish to support food security and sustainable agriculture. We know Haiti used to be self-sufficient in agriculture, and we want to help Haiti achieve that status again," she said, speaking during her visit to Haiti.

During her visit to Santo Domingo, she announced that the United States would add \$12.5 million for the extension of the Center for Excellence for Teacher Training Program (CETT) to enhance teacher training, to work on school curricula and supplies, in mathematics, and in language instruction, to help with school governance. "This program is proving to be, in partnership with the Ministry of Education here, such a success that we're not only expanding it to 450 schools in the Dominican Republic, but we want the Dominican Republic to serve as the model for the expansion of this program throughout the region," she said. USAID, the Ministry of Higher Education and the PUCMM University are partners in this program.

During her visit, she asked President Fernandez for increased cooperation with regional partners. "The United States is and will be investing millions of dollars in improved law enforcement, improved information gathering and sharing, improved judicial systems and public institutions throughout our hemisphere. The Dominican Republic is doing its part. President Fernandez is showing leadership. He will be hosting a public security meeting later this year so countries in our hemisphere can discuss together how we will fight the drug-fueled crime and lawlessness we face."

*Charles S. Farrell*

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