

MY CHILDHOOD

By: Jerry Rivers

I was born in 1941 in a small town called Gerona. It was located on the Isle of Pines, a mountainous island off the coast of Cuba. My school was in Palm Grove, about five miles away. My teacher was very mean. If a student didn't know the answer he would slap us with a ruler. Back then, no one knew about learning disorders. I didn't know until three years ago that I was dyslexic. When I was young, I got hit with that ruler because I would stutter over words. It was completely different back then.

It was different also, because we didn't have school buses to pick us up, like they do now. We had to walk. It was an hour and a half trek to school, so my brother Albert and I would have to leave at 6:00 in the morning and wouldn't get home until around 2:00 in the afternoon. We dreaded the hike home because of the heat and were always very tired after our long walk. We weren't allowed to relax though, because there were chores that had to get done.

Because my father was a Merchant Marine, he was rarely home. He would return from his job about once every month or two and visit for a few days, but then he was off again to the high seas. Therefore, the responsibilities of running the farm fell on my mother, sister, two brothers and I.

It was my job to get water from the well for our cows. We had eight cows, two horses, lots of chickens, and a few pigs. My mother had a small garden for our vegetables, so my younger brother Bert and I had to pull weeds. Finally, after all our chores were done, my dog Sporty and I got to go fishing!

This is a story of a day in the life of young Jerry Rivers, that's me!

Jerry Rivers came to the U.S. in 1970 from Cuba. His wife, Mary, found an advertisement about the Adult Literacy Project and encouraged Jerry to give it a shot. Jerry has been working hard since 1998. Jerry's tutor is Gert Stevens. Gert was born in Vienna, Austria, and had to leave at age eleven because of Hitler. Gert became an elementary school teacher and taught in Chicago for forty years.

