

Antonio Chamizo Urquiola, â??El Nenoâ?•: The fascinating story of the man from Los Palacios who left his mark between Havana and New York.

Description

Brotherhood Herald

By Brotherhood Herald Editorial Staff
Based on the chronicles of Omar Rubio Ã•lvarez, Secretary of the Culture Commission of the *Fraternidad PalaceÃ±a* (Palacios Brotherhood).
The local history of Cuba holds the stories of unforgettable figures whose lives seem plucked from the pages of a novel. One such man is Antonio Chamizo Urquiolaâ??popularly known as â??El Nenoâ?• â??a distinguished son of Los Palacios (Pinar del RÃo) whose cunning, charisma, and later, culinary talent, left a mark both on the island and in the United States.

From Los Palacios to the Streets of Havana

Born in the early 20th century into a fine family from Los Palacios, Antonio Chamizo migrated to Havana at a young age in search of better opportunities. Those who knew him describe him as a jovial, charming, and courteous man with a wonderful disposition.
Yet, beneath this gentlemanly exterior lay a peculiar weaknessâ??and a remarkable skill: he became one of the most accomplished pickpockets in the Cuban capital. His manual dexterity was so extraordinary that many claimed he even surpassed the legendary â??ChaquetÃ³n,â?• the most famous â??gentleman thiefâ?• of that era.

A Historic Lesson for an American Expert

One of the most celebrated episodes of his life took place during the administration of Gerardo Machado, when the Judicial Police force was established. Alfonso Forsâ??uncle of Dr. Rogelio Fors, who served for many years as a lawyer in San CristÃ³balâ??was appointed to lead the unit. To train the new police leadership, the authorities brought in an expert investigator from the United States.
Alfonso Forsâ??a man of aristocratic bearing who favored impeccable white linen suits, but who possessed the spirit of a quintessential, mischievous Cuban pranksterâ??devised a plan together with â??El Neno.â?• He instructed him that, at the precise moment the newly arrived American officer stepped out of his car on the day of the reception, he should â??accidentallyâ?• bump into him, offer a polite apology, and then continue on his way. â??El Nenoâ?• executed the maneuver to perfection.

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Minutes later, once inside the building, the American officer began his lecture on modern investigative techniques. Shortly after midday, Fors suggested a break for lunch. Upon checking the time, the instructor reached for his pocket watchâ??only to find it missing. Alarmed, he searched through his belongings and discovered that his wallet had also vanished.
Beside himself with rage, he shouted at Fors, â??Iâ??ve been robbed!â?• With complete composure and a mischievous glint in his eye, the Cuban chief replied, â??Excellency, our police have already apprehended the pickpocket who robbed you.â?• He then pulled the wallet, a gold-plated watch, and a fountain pen from a desk drawer. The American expert, nearly suffering a heart attack from the sheer humiliation, exclaimed, â??Well, it seems I have nothing to teach you people,â?• and stormed out in a foul mood.

A Code of Honor at the Local Town Fair

Despite his line of work, â??El Nenoâ?• adhered to a strict code of respect toward his hometown. In 1954, like any good native of Los Palacios, he attended the townâ??s traditional fair. Dressed in a striking English cashmere suit, accompanied by an elegant Mexican lady, and enjoying the finest spirits at his table, he looked every bit the gentleman.
In the midst of the festivities, Mayor Bugallo approached him, visibly agitated, and demanded, â??Neno, itâ??s not even ten oâ??clock at night, and already five people have had their pockets picked!â?• Unfazed, Chamizo replied: â??Mayor, surely you understand that I donâ??t come to my hometown to commit misdeeds; I practice my trade in places frequented by the wealthyâ??Acapulco, New York, and elsewhere.â?• Having said this, he stepped away from the table briefly, and within half an hour, he returned to the mayor with the five stolen wallets in his hands, ready to be returned to their owners.

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From a U.S. prison to a master chef at the Waldorf Astoria

Antonio Chamizoâ??s international escapades eventually led to his capture by Interpol, resulting in a stint as an inmate in a U.S. prison. Far from giving up, he used his time abroad to master the English language and train as an expert chef.
His culinary talent earned him a position as a chef specializing in Latin cuisine at the prestigious Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New Yorkâ??at the time, considered the most cosmopolitan hotel in the world. His skill in the kitchen was such that he competed in international culinary contests, winning a significant award for his original creation: â??the Queenâ??s omeletâ?• (*la tortilla de la reina*).

Return to Cuba and his final years

In the early 1960s, â??El Nenoâ?• decided to return to his beloved Cuba to pursue his work with dedication. He took a job as a chef at the newly established National Institute for the Tourism Industry (INIT) and returned to his hometown to work in the kitchen of the restaurant â??El PalaceÃ±o,â?• where everyone admired both his exquisite culinary skill and. his exemplary conduct at work. Ultimately, he retired while still practicing his trade as a cook at the pizzeria in San CristÃ³balâ??the town where he resided until his passing in 1998â??leaving behind the legend of a truly one-of-a-kind man.

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