



Ybor City Chronicles: A Memoir

Ferdie Pacheco

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"As anyone knows who tunes him in on national TV as 'The Fight Doctor,' Ferdie Pacheco is a world-class spellbinder. But catching that verbal magic on a page is a rare gift. The proof is in the reading of this racy, vivid, evocative page-turner, as much fun to read as Ferdie had living it in this unique Cuban enclave, a world unto itself that he re-creates for us in Pachecoese, a lingua franca of the spirit."--Budd Schulberg

"Ferdie Pacheco takes us to a vanished time and place, full of affectionate laughter, the invincible optimism of immigrants, and the delicious aroma of good cigars. He makes all of us wish we'd grown up in Ybor City."--Pete Hamill

"Pure pleasure. Pacheco brings an enormous talent to this task. A renaissance man, he is perhaps best known as Muhammad Ali's physician, but he has also distinguished himself as a general practitioner serving Miami's inner city, a prominent boxing commentator, an accomplished artist, and a remarkable raconteur. It is the last quality that drives *Ybor City Chronicles*."--Gary R. Mormino, University of South Florida

With his gift for storytelling, Ferdie Pacheco stirs a gust of cigar smoke into the hot steam of *café con leche* and creates the magic of this lighthearted memoir. His stage is Ybor City, the colorful immigrant community on the edge of Tampa, and the time is 1935-45--the decade when Pacheco grew up and the community he loves outgrew its ethnic splendor.

Pacheco's respect for words began the day his story starts, when ten-year-old Ferdie climbs into a truck with Sweet Sam to deliver pharmaceuticals for La Economica, the family chemist shop. Along with prescription drugs, homeopathic "nerve" remedies, and laxatives, Sam totes a book of poetry and a dictionary, and before the day is out he prevails upon Ferdie to look up "procrastinate." "Succulent" and "delectable" follow.

Pacheco writes with the sentimentality of a Latin lover and the instincts of a stand-up comic. At the heart of his story is the fabled Columbia Restaurant, where he worked as a teen-age waiter for two summers--a job with status in Ybor City equal to that of being a New York Yankee ballplayer, he says. Its glamorous doors opened fifteen hours a day to the community's characters, and they become folk heroes under Pacheco's affectionate scrutiny: Pepe Lu Babo, the idiot savant of newspaper circulation; Chef Pijuan, who asked to have a menu buried with him when he died; Pan con Chinchas ("Bread and Bedbugs"), who had once been a lector in a cigar factory; Don Victoriano Manteiga, the resident intellectual who founded *La Gaceta*, the trilingual newspaper published today by his son Roland; and Dr. José Avellanal, who experimented with cryogenics on stray cats and practiced law, plastic surgery, gynecology, the ministry, and higher education, all from his "office" in the hotel El Pasaje.

Though Pacheco describes years spanning the Great Depression and World War II, his days then were blissfully contained by his Spanish/Cuban/Italian enclave. After school he visited his *abuelita*, the grandmother who fixed him cups of thick hot chocolate and reminded him that science was more important than art if he wanted to become a doctor. He went to western movies in splendid air-conditioned theaters on Saturday and, in his teen years, to tea dances at ethnic social clubs on Sunday. On fine days, the yellow trolley--known as the "jewel of Tampa Electric" for its wicker seats and lacquered wood interior--took him to picnics at nearby Sulphur Springs.

With no excuses for the past, he recalls that his father, J.B., woke each morning to the sight of his wife standing by his bedside with his cup of Cuban coffee in her hand, ready to help him on with his shoes, and that J.B. ended every evening in the cool cellar of the Centro Asturiano club, smoking cigarettes, playing

cards, drinking a last cup of espresso.

Ybor City Chronicles includes vintage photographs and Pacheco's own cartoons, sketches, and paintings, many never before published, and an epilogue by Ybor City historian Tony Pizzo, who describes the features that today make Ybor City a National Historic Monument.

Ferdie Pacheco, M.D., is the author of the novel *Renegade Lightning* and of two books of nonfiction, *Muhammad Ali: A View from the Corner* and *Fight Doctor*, an account of his life as a physician in the fight world. He practiced medicine from 1958 to 1980 and served as Muhammad Ali's personal physician from 1963 to 1977. In recent years, he has served as boxing color commentator for NBC-TV, Showtime, and Univision. In 1990 he received an Emmy for writing, producing, and narrating the NBC special "Ali Wins the Title." He is also a painter and has exhibited one-person shows in London, Paris, New York, Miami (where he now lives), and other cities throughout the United States.

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