

Camaraderie in Cuba: Ernesto Bazan's Self-Publishing Philosophy



Ernesto Bazan

The following images are from Ernesto Bazan's latest self-published book *Al Campo*.

For every boon that Ernesto Bazan has received, he can point to a parallel moment where he gave to someone else. “I strongly believe that in life, the more you give, the more you get back,” the Sicilian-born photographer said. “There’s no doubt that that’s the way it should be.”

This philosophy was something that Bazan saw again and again during his 14 years living in Cuba, especially in the five years he spent shooting rural life. He found that instead of the conflict-ridden urban place he often saw portrayed, the Cuba he lived in was one with a strong sense of community and charity. “There is a lot of daily life taking place on the streets,” he said. “Neighbors talk to one another if they need a favor, if they need some matches or garlic and the exchange of several things.” The Cubans Bazan encountered may not have had much, but what they did have, they shared. The camaraderie was so strong, so palpable, that Bazan was reminded of his own early, cozy childhood in Palermo. That spirit of reciprocity also crept into his work.

The dreamy, hazy images that fill the pages of Bazan's latest book, called *Al Campo*, portray hard-working farmers, boisterous children and modest but colorful homes. The scenes reveal poverty, yes, but more noticeably they reveal resonating warmth. Farmers with wiry frames band together to work the land; small children dressed in little to no clothing lend one another a hand.

And more than just permeating the content of the pages, Bazan's philosophy helped him actually publish the work. Both *Al Campo* and Bazan's previous photography book, entitled *Cuba*, were self-published, a feat which would have been impossible without help from the photographer's beloved students. While in Cuba, Bazan had spent several years teaching in-depth photography workshops, around 10 or 11 a year, and consequently became very close to many of his students. In 2006, calamity struck when the Cuban government cracked down on the photographer's practice of teaching, and he was forced to leave the country. It was then that he realized, after giving so much to his students, that he would need help from them.



Courtesy of Ernesto Bazan

Ernesto Bazan editing at the computer during a workshop in Sicily last year.

He wrote to them, requesting help with the editing, production and funding that would be required to turn his photographs into two self-published works. Though he said he had no idea what kind of response he would receive, more than 50 of his students joined together, each contributing their talent and money, to help make the photographer's dream a reality.

Bazan may have devoted his time and energy to educating his students—not to mention sacrificing his Cuban home because he refused to quit teaching—yet he feels that all his effort has come back full circle. “It was a great privilege for me because I think I’m the only one with this incredible student support,” he said. “Basically, I feel that, thanks to giving all of myself, I’ve been getting so much back.”

Ernesto Bazan is a Mexico-based photographer. *Al Campo* was published in 2011 and you can see more work [here](#).

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