

from *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent
the World* (1998) by Alan Weisman
"Overture" (Introduction to the book.)

YEARS BEFORE BELISARIO BETANCUR BECAME PRESIDENT OF COLOMBIA and proceeded to startle his fractured nation by risking a fledgling peace with Marxist insurgents who, at that time, ruled more territory than the government; before he filled the halls of state with works and recitals by Colombia's greatest painters, musicians, and poets, and invited the public in to see and hear; before he had the wizards from Gaviotas outfit his presidential mansion with their artful devices that coaxed the sun's bountiful energy through Bogotá's dour skies—long before all that, he heard a story that he never forgot.

It was the kind of thing, he explained thirty-five years later to Paolo Lugari, the founder of Gaviotas, that jerked everything else into perspective. "It still does. Listen."

"I will, *Presidente*. And then I have one for you."

This was March, 1996: They were in Betancur's northeast Bogotá apartment, sipping chamomile tea. Outside, a cold rain pummeled the 9,000-foot skirts of the Andes. The roundfaced, silver-haired former president, now 73, sat in his leather chair, wrapped in a thick blue sweater and red wool scarf. Lugari, bearded and burly, evidently oblivious to the chill, wore his usual lightweight tropical suit. In his large hands, the china cup and saucer looked frail as eggshells.

"The year," Betancur began, "was 1962. I was a senator then."

A senator: Back then, the very notion had seemed miraculous. Belisario Betancur was one of twenty-three children born to nearly illiterate peasants. When he was eight, he'd found an illustrated volume of ancient history on his village school's bookshelves. Intrigued by the quaint pictures, he learned to read it. Soon he was scouring encyclopedias for more about the Peloponnesian wars, about Carthage, about the Roman emperor Hadrian, about anything Greek or Latin.

At his teachers' urging, his stunned parents eventually sent him to a

4 seminary in Medellín, where he spent the next five years conversing solely in those classical languages—even on weekends, when Spanish was permitted, because he was routinely being punished for some breach of cloister decorum. His masters ultimately concluded that, however brilliant, he was too impetuous for the priesthood; the rector who expelled him arranged for his placement in a university. There he studied law and architecture, but ended up a journalist.

It was not an auspicious time. In 1948, Colombia had fallen into a horrific civil war; over the following decade, an epoch known today simply as *La Violencia*, hundreds of thousands died. There was little of comfort to report, but during those years Betancur discovered something of which most of his compatriots seemed barely aware: To the east of the Andes, which bisect Colombia like a great diagonal sash, lay half the country, virtually uninhabited save for scattered bands of nomadic Indians.

The destiny that led him over the mountains took the form of a pilot who invited him to see exotic places seldom mentioned in the press. He went, and then returned as often as he could. What he found was Colombia's Amazon forest and, further north, *los llanos*: a vast savanna, drained by the Río Orinoco, that stretched clear to Venezuela. Both were so huge and untouched that Betancur was soon convinced that, one way or another, the key to his country's future was there. Years later, in 1982, as a candidate for the presidency he would fly over the *llanos*, spot the community known as Gaviotas, land, and conclude that he'd been correct.

It took the first and only military dictatorship in Colombia's history, which began in 1953 and lasted four years, to finally snuff *La Violencia*. In its aftermath, Belisario Betancur, one of a scarred generation of survivors who had dreamed for an anguished decade of setting their country straight, entered politics.

"So there I was, a senator in a country trying to resurrect itself, having dinner in Washington, D.C., one evening at the Inter-American Development Bank."

At that time, 1962, the Inter-American Development Bank was a fresh

offshoot of the World Bank, which had burst like a huge weed from the rubble of World War II and begun to broadcast its seed everywhere. The directors of the new multinational monetary funds were charged with cobbling together a battle-fatigued planet, by moving money into distant places where frequently the locals never before knew they needed it. Sooner or later, Betancur realized, these could include regions such as Colombia's Amazon forest and the *llanos*. His country needed development, he believed, but who would decide what kind? On his last visit to the *llanos*, a Guahibo Indian shaman had peered into a cloud of ritual tobacco smoke and correctly divined the precise arrival time of Betancur's overdue bush pilot. What did bankers at international lending institutions understand about such people and places?

That night over dinner, Bank president Felipe Herrera, a Chilean economist, told of a tiny Indian village on the high altiplano near Bolivia's Lake Titicaca, where he'd gone on a feasibility study for a proposed hydroelectric dam. Upon completing the site visit, his team realized they hadn't used their entire travel budget. Since the village lacked everything, they assembled the local chiefs and explained that they had some money left. In gratitude for hospitality and assistance, they'd like to give it to the community as a gift. "What project would you like us to fund here in the name of the Bank?"

The Indian elders excused themselves and went off to discuss this offer. In just five minutes they returned. "We know what we want to do with the money."

"Excellent. Whatever you want."

"We need new musical instruments for our band."

"Maybe," replied the Bank team spokesman, "you didn't understand. What you need are improvements like electricity. Running water. Sewers. Telephone and telegraph."

But the Indians had understood perfectly. "In our village," the eldest explained, "everyone plays a musical instrument. On Sundays after mass, we all gather for *la retreta*, a concert in the church patio. First we make

6 music together. After that, we can talk about problems in our community and how to resolve them. But our instruments are old and falling apart. Without music, so will we."

"And now," said Betancur, offering Lugari a silver dish of fried plantain slices, "let's hear yours."

"*Señor Presidente*," said Paolo Lugari, shaking his head, "you're not going to believe this."

Juanita Eslava hadn't known whether to believe it either. The forest was enchanted, she'd essentially been told, by no less than Dr. Gustavo Yepes, director of the faculty of music at Bogotá's prestigious Universidad de Los Andes. Juanita, grand-niece of a famous Colombian poet-composer, Luis Carlos González, and granddaughter of a popular singer, was training at Los Andes to become a lyric soprano. She was on her way to a rehearsal for a 1996 European choral tour when she saw a notice on the bulletin board stating that a place called Gaviotas was looking for a few daring musicians.

"I don't know," she said, when Dr. Yepes explained that it was to help start an orchestra in a tropical paradise. "I'd have to miss Europe."

"Europe will be there next year. It's not going anywhere. When are you going to get another chance to do anything like this?"

That was hard to say, because Juanita had never heard of anything like this. For that matter, who had? Seriously, *los llanos*? Europe seemed closer.

She had at least heard of Gaviotas. That was unavoidable for any Los Andes student, because the road that climbed through the skirts of the cordillera toward campus wound right past the office that the Gaviotans maintained in Bogotá. It was impossible to miss: an assemblage of brick and glass cubes, surrounded by colorful bursts of oddly graceful machinery rising above the eucalyptus. These included several windmills mounted on glossy yellow masts of varying heights, whose blades were not the typical narrow triangles but aluminum skewers, tipped with paddles

shaped like cross-sections of an airplane wing. Alongside these stood a collection of bright red canisters of different sizes, assorted pipes and levers painted royal blue, and a bank of silvery rectangular surfaces. To passersby, the impression was technological yet pleasing and sculptural, like the promise of an appealing future waiting just beyond the encroaching urban bedlam below.

Engineering students at Los Andes knew about the silver rectangles, which had begun to appear around Bogotá during the mid-1980s, while Belisario Betancur was president of Colombia. Conventional wisdom said that solar panels wouldn't work in a city that was overcast more than half the year, but Gaviotas had come up with coatings for their models that gathered the energy even of diffused sunlight. Besides the presidential palace where Betancur formerly resided, their solar collectors were now atop condominiums, apartments, convents, orphanages, and on the brick edifices of Bogotá's 30,000-inhabitant Ciudad Tunal, the largest public housing complex in the world to use only solar energy to heat its water. The nation's biggest hospital had not only converted their water heating system but had also installed solar "kettles" designed by Gaviotas technicians, capable of wresting temperatures sufficiently scalding from Bogotá's scant sunshine to purify water for drinking and sterilizing instruments.

But Dr. Yepes didn't even mention solar collectors to Juanita. He was talking about music. And trees.

Gaviotas wasn't just some high-tech research firm designing new-fangled gadgetry, he assured her. Gaviotas was actually a place—a wondrous place in the middle of the practically treeless tropical plains of eastern Colombia, except it was now in the middle of a forest. An incredible forest of its own making. And now Gaviotas would soon be making music as well.

"*Música llanera?*" Juanita asked. If so, what did this have to do with her? The traditional country music of the Colombian *llanos*, with its harps, four-string *cuatros*, and twangy *bandolas*, was a long way from the Italian arias she sang.

Gustavo Yepes explained. One evening a few years earlier, he had been introduced to Paolo Lugari after a choral performance of Bach's sacred music. That night, Lugari had pumped Yepes's hand and boomed in his basso profundo, "Tell me, Gustavo: How do composers' creative passions, which are born of random, nonlinear emotion, deal with the structure of music, which is mathematical and therefore lineal?"

It was a strange, remarkable question, but Yepes had heard that this was a strange, remarkable person. "I imagine it's much the same," he replied, "as what happens at Gaviotas. People who dare to build a utopia use the same materials available to anyone, but they find surprising ways to combine them. That's exactly what composers do with the twelve tones of the scale. Like you, they're dreamers. In a dream you aren't limited by what is assumed to be permissible or possible."

"Gaviotas isn't a utopia," Lugari interrupted. "Utopia literally means 'no place'. In Greek, the prefix 'u' signifies no. We call Gaviotas a *topia*, because it's real. We've moved from fantasy to reality. From *utopia* to *topia*. Someday you need to come see it."

That day, Yepes told Juanita, had unexpectedly arrived in October, 1995. Paolo Lugari had called to say that some German journalists had chartered a plane out to the *llanos* to see Gaviotas. There was an extra seat, and he especially wanted Yepes to accompany them.

"Why me?"

"You'll see."

What he saw—and heard—belied Lugari's protestations; to Yepes, Gaviotas seemed not only proof that utopia on earth was possible, but that it was arguably more practical than what currently passed for conventional society. Five hundred kilometers away from his increasingly frightening city, Yepes had found himself in a tranquil village, shaded by the gallery forest of a tributary of the Río Orinoco and filled with flowers and dazzling, melodious birds. The people of Gaviotas collectively exuded a quality so novel that Yepes wasn't sure he'd seen it before—but once encountered, it was unmistakable: They were happy. They rose before dawn, worked hard and productively, ate simply but well, and were peaceful. The

machinery they used dominated neither them nor their landscape: it was mostly of their own design or adaptation, and mostly quiet. "May I retire here?" Yepes had asked Lugari, after watching children playing on a seesaw that was also a water pump, which tapped kid power to replenish a reservoir for the Gaviotas school.

"Don't wait to retire. Come sooner. You're exactly what we need."

They were walking down a red dirt path that led past a grove of mango trees, an outdoor basketball court, polygonal modular living quarters, and a community meeting hall with a parabolic swoosh of roof, contoured from shining metal to deflect the equatorial heat. Just south of town, the path widened into a road, with a tall pine forest rising on either side. They exchanged waves with six men and a woman dressed in caps, colored neckerchiefs, tee shirts and tool belts, who rode past on thick-tired bicycles. Lugari steered Yepes into the forest as he began to explain. "For the past quarter-century—ever since Gaviotas began," he said, "I've been studying the history and literature of utopic communities."

"I thought you said this wasn't utopia."

"Neither were any of those other places. They were attempts." Lately, Lugari had been reading about the famed experiment of 17th century Paraguay, when Jesuit priests arrived to evangelize the New World. Until then, colonizers throughout most of the Americas had considered indigenous peoples either expendable savages or exploitable slaves. But the Jesuits who ended up far from the trade routes, in the distant region where the borders of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay now converge, saw the resident Guaraní Indians as a kind of *tabula rasa*: untainted *Homo sapiens* in their natural state, potentially perfectable. Being missionaries, of course, meant having certain preconceptions about perfection, and these Jesuits soon set about replacing the natives' language, god, and means of sustenance. Their missions, aptly named "reductions," were consummately paternalistic but nevertheless benevolent, self-sustaining communities that prospered for more than a century, until the Jesuits fell into disfavor with Spain and Portugal and were expelled from colonial Latin America.

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Paolo Lugari was not interested in evangelism—Gaviotas didn't even have a church. What enthralled him about that historic Paraguayan experiment was the music. "Everyone," he told Yepes, "was taught to sing or to play a musical instrument. Music was the loom that wove the community together. Music was in school, at meals, even at work: Musicians accompanied laborers right into the corn and *yerba mate* fields. They'd take turns, some playing, some harvesting. It was a society that lived in constant harmony—literally. It's what we intend to do, right here in this forest. That's why I asked you to come."

But Yepes wasn't listening—or rather, he *was* listening, but not to Lugari's words. He stopped and held up his palm. "Quiet for a moment," he said. Silence, except for the drumming of a woodpecker and a rustle of breeze in the pine boughs. Then: "Keep talking," he whispered.

"What?"

"Did you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"Talk."

They were in a thicket enclosed by forty-foot Caribbean pines and a leafy tangle of deciduous trees and shrubs. Even at tropical noon, the forest air was delectably cool. Amidst the profuse foliage of the understory, it was hard to discern that the pines were actually growing in evenly spaced rows. Thirteen years earlier, this woodland—now the biggest reforestation in Colombia, more extensive than all the government's forestry projects combined—had been mainly empty savanna, devoid of anything but low, nutrient-poor grasses. By 1995, the number of trees Gaviotas had planted was approaching six million.

Yepes was taut with excitement. "Paolo. Just say something. Anything."

Shrugging, Lugari started to explain how, when he and the early Gaviotans first came out here from Bogotá in the early 1970s, they had tested hundreds of crops, but nothing thrived in these highly acidic, leached tropical soils, whose natural levels of aluminum bordered on tox-

icity. Then, a Venezuelan agronomist seated next to him at a conference in Caracas suggested trying tropical pine seedlings obtainable from Honduras.

The trees grew. The Gaviotans debated among themselves whether it was wise to cultivate an exotic species. Some argued that the issue was political, not environmental, since the same pines also grow in Panama, which was once part of Colombia. Had the United States not stolen the isthmus and installed a puppet government in order to dig their canal, these would still be native Colombian trees.

The controversy, along with the matter of what to do with pines since they weren't edible, was settled by a succession of random occurrences, the kind of unpredictability that the Gaviotans had come to love as they tinkered with improving reality. Who could have guessed that Caribbean pines would prove to be sterile in the *llanos*, posing no invasive competition to local flora? Who could have known that their bark resin, a natural protection against the tropics' array of hungry insects, would flow so copiously here that it could be harvested like maple syrup—more, really, like milk from cows, because tapping the thick amber liquid seemed to stimulate production without hurting the trees? Or that here pines would mature nearly a decade faster than forestry texts predicted? Or that until a few months ago, Colombia had been importing millions of dollars' worth of resins annually for paint, varnishes, turpentine, cosmetics, perfume, medicines, rosin for violin bows—until, that is, Gaviotas inaugurated a forest products industry that involved leaving trees in place, not mowing them down?

"And, most wonderful of all, Gustavo, who could've—"

"Wait."

"I was just getting to the most important part."

"Did you say violin bows?"

"Right. That's one of the reasons I wanted you to come here. But not just rosin. We realize that when we have to thin the forest we can use the surplus wood to start a musical instrument factory, and—"

12 "Do you have any idea how perfect a place this is to make music?"

"Exactly. That's why we wanted you to come here."

"No," Yepes insisted. "You don't know what I mean. Listen."

So Lugari did, and that's how, three months later, Juanita Eslava found herself not in Paris, but in the middle of a forest under a full moon at midnight, in what most of her compatriots considered the middle of nowhere, preparing to sing an aria by Respighi. According to what Yepes had told her, yet another random stroke of luck had inexplicably imbued the Gaviotas forest with magnificent acoustics. "We were standing in the woods," he recalled, "and suddenly I realized that I could hear distant voices, as though they were amplified. I clapped my hands. Then I yelled. I made Lugari whisper. There's incredible resonance in there. We don't know why. Maybe the forest canopy vibrates. Maybe it has to do with the physics of unorganized spaces. Paolo wants an engineering student to write a thesis about the effect. I just want to build a bandshell to focus it."

Like a pair of excited kids, right there Yepes and Lugari had started planning an outdoor amphitheater-in-the-pines, with some form of retractable roof for rain, like the one on the Gaviotas administration building. "Probably need to encase the whole thing in mosquito netting, too," Paolo had added. They envisioned concerts of classical symphonic instruments and also a resident *llanos* orchestra, comprised of entire sections of Orinocan *cuatros*, *bandolas*, and harps made from renewable Gaviotas pine.

Juanita wasn't so sure about these ambitious schemes: Rather than forty *bandolas* plucking Beethoven's Sixth, she preferred the idea of combining violins and cellos with folk instruments to create a sonorous new mix of timbres. She was impressed, though, at how serious the Gaviotans were about their musical future. During the 1970s and 1980s, when many of its famous technological innovations were being developed, Gaviotas entered agreements with Juanita's university and several others to bring scientists and engineers here to research their graduate theses. Under the

most recent accord with the Universidad de Los Andes, however, Gaviotas had requested painters, sculptors, and musicians. “There’s no such thing as sustainable technology or economic development without sustainable *human* development to match,” Lugari had told her when she arrived. “Over twenty-five years, Gaviotas has accomplished much, but we need so much more.”

Juanita’s mission was to establish a classical music program in the Gaviotas school: the first step toward building an orchestra. She was also to get to know, and record, resident Gaviotas *llanero* musicians. And, finally, she was to tramp around the woods until she found the spot where her voice projected best, so the Gaviotans would know exactly where to build their theater—if, in fact, this business about its alleged acoustic properties were true, and not simply Yepes’ imagination having been seduced by the spell of the place.

So there stood Juanita Eslava, her long dark braid glinting under lemony moonlight in a forest that her distinguished professor swore had magical properties, ready to find out. For some reason, she had delayed this moment until now. Maybe it was because Gaviotas had turned out to be such an island of blessed tranquility in the midst of her roiling nation. During her first month here she had learned as much as she taught, from listening to *músicos* who could echo the gallop of horses on their *bandolas* and the sweetness of the trade winds on their harps. Every morning, she awakened to a delirious symphony of nesting tanagers, cotingas, and oropendolas outside her window. The Gaviotas schoolchildren she taught to sing were the healthiest humans she’d ever met, happy and unafraid as the monkeys cavorting overhead. Everything was so sublime that maybe she was scared to spoil it by putting something she suspected was implausible to the test. But on this night of a full moon, a group of her new friends finally had dragged her off to sing in the trees. They spaced themselves at varying intervals: ten, twenty, fifty meters away from where she stood. Then they waited.

Juanita struck a tuning fork against her knee, hummed the pitch, closed her eyes, and inhaled deeply. All around her was lush, fragrant

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evidence of an indisputable miracle, a portent that the place might very well be enchanted. In the moist, sheltered understory of the Gaviotas pines, an indigenous tropical forest was regenerating. A team of frankly amazed biologists from Colombia’s Universidad Nacional already had recorded 240 species probably not seen in the *llanos* for millennia, except in fragments of terrain alongside the streambeds. Another unpredicted stroke of fortune had rendered moot the concerns about introducing a monoculture of *Pinus caribaea* into the *llanos*—it was as though the savanna’s thin green ribbons of riparian forest had overflowed their banks and were spreading across the plain.

Some trees, such as the slender purple jacaranda Juanita was leaning against, already towered higher than the pines. With thousands more hectares available for planting, the Gaviotans had decided to let the native species slowly choke out the *Pinus caribaea* over decades and return the *llanos* to what many ecologists believe was their primeval state: an extension of the Amazon. Already, the populations of deer, anteaters, and capybaras were growing.

When she opened her eyes and began to sing, an angel’s aria from Respighi’s *Lauda Per La Natività Del Signore* emerged.

Pastor, voice che vegghiate

Shepherds, you who watch over
sovra la greggia en quista regione;

your flocks as they graze here;

i vostr’occhi levate

lift your eyes

By the calendar, this was just before the March equinox, but Juanita had spontaneously decided to invoke Respighi’s celebration of the Nativity. Her voice, hesitant at first, began to billow through the forest like a silver mist, expanding as it swirled from tree to tree. Nightjars, owls, and lapwings joined in, cooing in plaintive dissonance that resolved into haunting harmony as she continued:

ch'io son l'Angel de l'eternal magione.

for I am the Angel of the eternal mansion.

Ambasciaria ve fone

I bring you a message,

ed a voie vangelizzo gaudio fino

and news of pure joy

Celestial music rose into the branches. The forest canopy gathered and magnified her clear tones, showering them down around her friends like gently falling pine needles. When she finally ended, they gathered around and embraced her, several nearly in tears. Luisa Fernanda Ospina, the bacteriologist in charge of quality control at the resin factory, stared in awe at the trees rising moonward. "This place is proof that God exists," she declared.

Gonzalo Bernal nodded. During the 1970s and early 1980s, he had directed the Gaviotas school; now, in the 1990s, he was community coordinator. "Now I know for certain that we live in paradise," he whispered. "We can hear angels."

"So now Gaviotas will become a choir of angels. When I went there the first time," Belisario Betancur reminded Lugari, "I merely saw prophets. But I have a weakness for prophets like you who preach in a desert. It was like I'd heard a message. I immediately wanted to convert all Colombia into a Gaviotas."

He leaned back and gazed at a pair of framed sketches above the gray velvet couch opposite his chair, landscapes of the Colombian Andes. "Imagine," he sighed, "if this were all Gaviotas."

The sketches, signed and dedicated to him, were studies for oil paintings by the Colombian master Alejandro Obregón, one of which now hung at the United Nations, the other in the Vatican. Over the bookcases were more works by Colombian artists, gifts for the presidential palace that were later removed by Betancur's successors. The most famous of

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these, a painting that became the symbol of his presidency, occupied the space over the mantel. It showed a plump white dove with a fig leaf in its beak, portrayed by the renowned Colombian painter and sculptor Fernando Botero.

In the 1980s, its likeness had been borne aloft by exhilarated throngs marching through the streets of Bogotá, Cali, Medellín, and Cartagena. Botero's dove adorned posters for concerts, banners for theater festivals, children's clothing; it became the embodiment of the hope engendered by Betancur's peace initiative. While in office, he had proposed an unprecedented amnesty to thousands of Marxist rebels who had formed guerrilla armies a few years after the 1957 truce that ended *La Violencia* supposedly brought peace to the land. This new uprising, which had killed many thousands, was still underway and was now the longest-running armed insurgency in Latin America. Under Betancur's plan, guerrillas could trade their weapons for the chance to create their own political party and battle legitimately within the civil system. The largest insurgent army agreed to participate, and, in 1984, scores of guerrilla soldiers laid down their arms. Subsequently, the party they and their sympathizers founded, the Patriotic Union, won elections nationwide for mayoral seats, town councils, and for Colombia's national congress.

Within a decade, the majority of those victors—some two thousand, plus two presidential candidates—had been assassinated. The perpetrators, who sometimes issued gleeful press releases, were right-wing paramilitary death squads.

The guerrillas, of course, retaliated. Soon, their attacks and ambushes surpassed former levels, as did kidnappings for enormous ransoms to finance their subversion. In a monstrous reprise of *La Violencia*, massacres of civilians whose villages were supposedly aligned with one side or the other became almost weekly events. These atrocities were blamed on both right-wing paramilitaries and left-wing guerrillas, but rarely solved. Both extremes had become so deeply corrupted by the bounty of the narcotics trade that, after a while, it barely seemed to matter which was which.

Faster even than the Gaviotas pines, cattle ranches of drug lords had advanced across the *llanos*, in cadence with the march of coca cultivation in the Amazonian provinces to the south. By 1996, the current presidential administration was so tainted by a scandal involving drug spoils that several prominent members of the president's party and campaign staff—including Fernando Botero's own son, the ex-Minister of Defense—were in jail. When a massive Botero sculpture of the peace dove was wrecked by a bomb that killed dozens in a Medellín park one Sunday, the grieving artist directed that it be left in pieces as a monument to the shambles his country had become.

Approaching the end of the century, Colombians frequently had come to wonder aloud whether their nation could actually survive. "These things take time," Belisario Betancur would remind people. "I never thought that the process we began would be completed during just one presidential term. Over three or four decades, peace was systematically destroyed in our country. It was like an *ovillo*, a ball of wool that had been unraveling for years. To pretend that one could roll it up in four years would have been an illusion. But we had to start somewhere."

During Betancur's time in office, the *llanos* became the haven to which he retreated so often that his own party leaders complained, because there were no votes out there. "Not many votes, but so much Colombia," he'd reply. The boundless landscape restored his spirit, and Gaviotas—where his plane often touched down unannounced—was where he could happily stand in line for meals like everyone else, surrounded by people who, since they lived contentedly without any government themselves, embraced him and not his office.

"The history you are writing reads like poetry," Betancur said, as he and Lugari embraced at the door. "And now you're setting it to music, too."

"You will join us for the first concert," Lugari replied. "It will be in your honor."

The old ex-president beamed at the thought of returning to Gaviotas.

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"This," he once told Gabriel García Márquez when he sent him there, "is what Colombia needs."

"This," he'd repeated, as President Felipe González of Spain and his family boarded a plane bound for Gaviotas' grass airstrip, "is what Latin America needs."

And when a group from the Club of Rome visited Gaviotas in 1984, Club founder Aurelio Peccei declared to Betancur, "This is what the world needs."

(end of chapter)