



### **DROPS OF REMEMBRANCE**

BY JUAN M. BRACETE

Vantage Press, New York, NY, 2012. 66 pages, \$10.95.

Reviewed by R. Mark Frey

A career in the United States Foreign Service—the allure of exotic locales, climes, cultures, and peoples, has caused many of us to consider it. It can be a great way to see the world and possibly play a role in world events, while also having the honor of representing our country. How does one pursue such a career? How does one go about joining this elite group of people? What skills and talents does the Department of State seek for the position? What may one expect from such a career path?

These questions and more form the basis of Juan Bracete's account of his life and career. Born and raised by his grandparents in Puerto Rico, Bracete led a solitary childhood marked by many hours reading books borrowed from his grandfather's library while dreaming of a life in another land far away from his small isolated island. These dreams were encouraged by the fact that his grandfather's prominence exposed Bracete to a stream of high-ranking island people and visitors from Europe. A trip to Europe at age 10 with his grandparents contributed even more to his desire to live abroad: "The desire to achieve, grow up and rush into the world outside the balmy Caribbean was overpowering. That mustard seed was exploding within me."

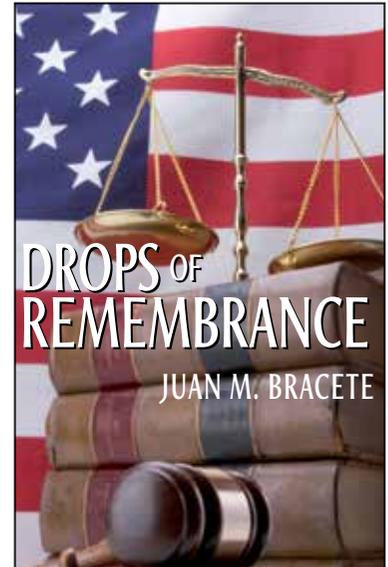
Although Bracete's grandfather discouraged him from attending school abroad, he pursued studies at Georgetown University, soaking up the culture in and around Washington, D.C. Unable to find a job after graduation, he returned to Puerto Rico to work as a junior credit officer at a local savings and loan association. He moved on some six months later to a bank, then to law school and, during the summer preceding his last semester, did an internship with the Department of Justice's Tax Division, in Washington, D.C.

Bracete hoped for post-graduation employment with the Tax Division but, as luck would have it, the Board of Immigration Appeals had an opening. The Board offered

to send him to Georgetown University for a preparatory, graduate-level immigration law course taught by Charles Gordon. Bracete grabbed the opportunity and soon commenced work with the Board of Immigration Appeals. Later, because of his grandfather's terminal illness, he quit his job and returned to Puerto Rico. Bracete initially despaired about his employment prospects in Puerto Rico, but, as he notes, "God provides for madmen, children and fools," and, not long after returning, he was hired by a local law firm, where he worked for six years. By then, his grandfather had passed away and he developed an itch to seek government service on the mainland. Contacting former supervisors at the Department of Justice, he was hired to be an immigration judge in Miami. He remained in that position for four and a half years and then followed it with three and a half years of private practice. Finally, he was appointed to the Foreign Service. He considered it a dream come true, but he also felt apprehensive about starting a new career and moving to Washington, D.C., after eight years in the Miami area.

Following training at the Foreign Service Institute, Bracete served his first assignment in Caracas, Venezuela, where he carried out such none-too-pleasant tasks as visits to the morgue and to U.S. citizens in prison, while he wended his way through a political minefield of coworkers, local citizens, and government officials in both Washington, D.C., and Venezuela.

Bracete's second assignment took him to his wife's homeland of El Salvador, but then he resigned his Foreign Service employment in order to pursue local opportunities that unfortunately failed to materialize. After a couple of other steps that I'll skip, he opened a law practice in El Salvador, and, after a year, he was appointed to the unpaid position of Minister Counselor of the Embassy of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Republic of El Salvador; he took this post because of his interest in the Order's humanitarian projects in El Salvador. This was followed by an appointment to Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Republic of El Salvador—a position he held for nine



years until December 30, 2009, when he resigned and returned to the United States.

*Drops of Remembrance* is enjoyable, and Bracete's account of his days in Venezuela are especially insightful. But I found myself desiring more from his autobiography—more discussion of his formative years with his grandparents, more discussion of his varied education in both Puerto Rico and the United States, and more discussion of his work in immigration law, as he has a unique perspective forged during his years as an attorney with the Board of Immigration Appeals, an immigration judge, and an attorney in private practice. I wanted to hear more about his career in the Foreign Service—both its good and bad aspects. Lastly, I would have been interested in his impressions, as someone from Puerto Rico, of life in the United States, both in Washington, D.C., and Miami.

I hope that Bracete will revisit and expand upon this book to give the reader a more comprehensive view of his life. He has lived a unique and fascinating one and has many insights to offer readers, especially young people on the cusp of making decisions about their own career paths. ©

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