



The Cuban Voice – Why I Came to America

By Patty Vila, SouthFloridaReporter.com, Cuba Expert, Sept 16, 2015 - Last Sunday, I met three friends for at Carpaccio in Bal Harbour to discuss the latest news coming from Cuba. I am keeping my friends anonymous but will give a brief description about them: Friend No. 1 worked for a Governor out west who did a lot for our country and just arrived from Cuba. Friend No. 2 is a Cuban man that just asked for political asylum a few weeks ago, and Friend No. 3 is a beautiful, intelligent and loving woman who lives in Colombia.

As I walked into the restaurant, they were waiting for me at the corner table with a glass of wine. I noticed a family was sitting next to us as I took my seat. As my friends and I spoke about our beloved Cuba, the waiters came out to sing happy birthday to one of the teenage boys at the table. My friends and I applauded, and said, "Happy Birthday."

The boy's grandmother looked right at me and said, "Thank you; I know exactly who you are." I said, "You do?"

Her name is Gladys. She told me that as soon as she heard my voice, she knew it was me. She recognized me from TV as I do commentary on several local TV shows every week, and people watch because they want to know what's happening in Cuba.

Everyone has a story... so I asked Gladys about her story. What had brought her to America? She came when she was 26 years old with two children. Her son was 18 months and her daughter was three months old. Her husband stayed behind. She tried everything to get her husband out of Cuba. It took fourteen years. She wrote letters to different countries asking for support - she even wrote a letter to the Pope.

Gladys left Cuba because she did not support communism. She settled in New York. She wore the same coat and shoes for eight years. She bought her and her children's clothes at a local thrift store. The clothes she purchased had holes, but she would take them home and sew them so her and her kids would have clothes to wear. She never asked this country for a hand-out. Gladys worked hard to provide for her family and give them a better future. Her brother stayed behind because he supported the regime. Her father died crying because he never saw his son (her brother) again.

Gladys never returned after leaving her beloved Varadero. Varadero is my favorite place on earth. It is a city where I would escape to find peace when I needed to get out of the hustle and smoke of Havana. Friend No. 1 and I encouraged her to go back. We told her it was time to heal and close the emotional embargo she has with herself. She is seriously considering a return trip to Cuba. I was going to share with Gladys moments regarding my most recent trip to Cuba when she told me "I saw you on Pedro Sevcec show, I know your story." I just smiled and nodded my head.

The Cuban division brings us all together one way or another. From a young age, I always knew I wanted to be part of the Cuba story. I felt that island pulling my soul from the age of 11. This is why I accepted the position to go live in Havana and establish the first American news agency in over 30 years for CNN. The job was not offered to anyone else and I took this as a sign that it is where I belonged.

When I meet people like Gladys or Ellie in London or the hundreds of others that write, text or call, it fuels me to keep going and fight for what I believe in. I do get my share of "haters" from time to time. The other day, a man messaged me on Facebook to tell me I am a "puta" and an agent of the Castro government. I admit these encounters hurt because I am only human. But, when I have a class act like Gladys tell me to keep up the good work, that she admires my work, and she enjoys my commentary, it makes me fight harder for the Cubans here and all the Cubans around the world that write me weekly.

Thank you, Gladys, for sharing your story with me. This was a very special encounter for me and I consider myself a lucky woman. I want her to know she is the one that needs to be admired - not me.