

## Cynthia Curtis

Definitely, the US Women Cuba Collaboration Delegation in September 2012 was the “right” way to visit Cuba, particularly for the first time. Overall, the chance to see Cuba through the lens of the women and men who “made” the Revolution happen, as well as their families and communities, was invaluable. Also, it was important to meet people who simply live and work in Cuba and love their country. We had access to the cream of the Revolution’s history and historians, plus its details—both large and small: hiking the Sierra Maestra, seeing the Comandancia’s post and Fidel’s hut, enjoy the flowers planted by Celia Sanchez at the post and climb the little stairs she had constructed to make the pathway easier, to meet relatives of campesinos murdered by Bautista, to have the especially privileged opportunity to meet the Quinteto Rebelde who played during battle, armed only with music and guitars, visiting the home of Vilma Espin and then the organization her daughter directs today, CENESEX.

Thanks to the “Collaboration,” and its smart approach to organizing such a trip, connecting past and present in a graceful and accessible way. Thanks as well for facilitating the strategic support of AMISTUR, ICAP and the FMC, and the possibility to meet the Cuban women who “make it all happen,” from the community to the workplace, from the organization to the nation.

The trip reconfirmed my belief that the bottom line is “this is all about people.” In the case of Cuba, “the people” are cultured, educated, proud, open, as well as concerned primarily about their economic situation and at the same time, not going back to the 1950’s. With stated recognition of errors along the way, and challenges related to race, gender, immigration, and diversity, one often hears the position, “these are Cuban problems and we need to and will solve them here in Cuba.”

On many levels, Cuba did not feel so different from Central American countries. It actually felt quite familiar on many levels. And, after seeing Cuba’s unconditional cooperation around health, education, disasters, culture and sports in Central America, the values of solidarity and internationalism outside of the island’s borders had already introduced me to Cuba in a meaningful way.

From the beginning of the trip, where our taxi driver in Miami, a 48 year old Cuban man who came to the US on the Peter Pan flights at age 3, and who wants “to visit Cuba before it changes, I am against the embargo but my 80 year old parents still support it,” and at the end of our travels, where the “voice” over the loudspeaker when de-planing in Miami “for those people who are making a “salida definitiva de Cuba,” wait on the air craft and an Immigration representative will attend you,” the role and impacts of US policy towards Cuba glares. A lot of work is going on, and much more needs to happen. Trips like this contribute to both.

Thanks to the Collaboration and to your partners in Cuba, for this important and necessary people-to-people experience.