

Memories of our Trip to Cuba November 2021



Linda Rawlinson 2021

I have been working on learning Spanish for maybe 2 years. It is an uphill battle especially putting words into sentences. Even though communication in words was difficult with our brothers and sisters in Cuba on this trip. We saw love in action whether it was the whole family sitting down for a visit, or a banquet prepared for us. Unselfishly giving coffee or pop which is so sacrificial for them, or kisses and hugs given, or moving tables from their kitchen to play a game of Sequence, or being available to interpret for us or delivering ice cream on a Sunday. These people sure do many other ways show us God's love.

So I will keep on trying to learn Spanish but so much more important for me is to follow the Cuban Christians and put love into what we do.



Matt Letkemann 2021

This is my third time going to Cuba and I'd have to say it was my favourite trip to date. It was great to see old friends and enjoy conversation and funny stories with them. It's a very difficult time right now in Cuba. With food prices rising 4 X (times) so if you can spare any finance at all please consider it. I will finish with two funny stories.

We passed through a small town called Zuluetta on the way to Placetas and there was a dog that stepped right in front of Walter and he had to stop. And the dog casually stretches out and didn't appear to be in a hurry. Two days later as we were passing through the same town, the same dog expresses the same carefree attitude as an approaching car moves towards it!

The second story is regarding our dear friend Shandry. They live in a small town called, "Baez" and there isn't much fresh fruit there and he said that he hasn't seen Guava, Mangos, or Papaya in months and on our way out

our friend Yonail spots a Guava tree on the way across from Shandry's house and he was teasing Shandry asking if he had left his house in the past year. LOL



Stepping out in Faith Thankful

Going on mission trips means Stepping out in Faith. This trip to Cuba was no exception. We had to book into a resort instead of the usual small Bed and Breakfast to even get into the country. We were small team of six as covid-19 and the uncertainty of travel safety held others back. But the Lord still used us to carry in over 600 lbs of aid.

Currently, Westjet isn't flying into Santa Clara which is central to where we need to be. We had to book with Air Transat. Even though WestJet is still holding our money from the March and December 2020 cancelled trips.

As we taxied to the small Santa Clara terminal, we noticed firetrucks spraying water onto our plane, our pilot announced it was a salute to being the first Air Transat passenger flight to arrive in Santa Clara since the Covid shutdown.

My main focus after we clear the visa and the scan processes is to get my two - 50 lb hockey bags, my 40 lb carry on and my "heavy big purse" which was so big it had to go up into the overheads. - women handle it all onto a cart and head for the door. Just before the exit you must show one last document before you are either waived through or sent to customs.

Success, waived through! I moved toward the door maneuvering the awkward heavy cart while trying to stow my documents. I lifted my head as someone handed me a small sample bottle of Cuban rum and another person handed me a fruit drink. While juggling all of that I noticed much cheering and the huge welcome we were getting. Costumes, singing, cheering, a mariachi band so much fanfare for the return of tourists to Cuba.

Onto the bus and off to the resort, travel days are long. Masks on the whole time. The Cuban people are serious about their masks, many are double masked – did I tell you it is hot there. We saw fully masked farmers on their horse carts in the middle of nowhere.

So thankful for the welcome and getting the aid through - the need in Cuba is great.

Stepping out in Faith

The direction we were given before we travelled on November 5th was that we were to stay on the resort until November 15 ... which would have meant a marathon of travelling the last four days. On November 6th that all changed, news came in the date had changed to the 7th! Still a marathon of travelling but the blessing of time to visit more pastors as Cuba Outreach Ministries and supporters now support 19 pastors in Cuba.

We rented two cars and set out on Monday the 8th to Placetatas to pick up our lead Pastor and translator Yonial to deliver the first of seven loads of aid. These cars were "well used" and caused us problems right from the start. There was even a flat tire on the causeway during the return trip on day one. Thankfully we were able to get a different car a day later.

How to get to Placetatas.....drive down the causeway for 45 minutes, turn left when you see the Eifel tower, then turn left at the big stone crab, next turn left at the dolphin fountain - it is not a round about so don't forget to stop. Turn right at the statute of the man with the cowboy hat. Watch for the two deep dips that cross the road and go around the horses, buggies, bikes, people meeting and wandering all over the road and oh the pot holes. Not to mention the dogs sleeping in the middle of the road.

Remember that the road sign with the yield triangle is a stop sign when it says Pare. Oh and no markings on most of the roads. And somehow, we found our way each day.

Stepping out in Faith

So many of the people that we visited have had covid and/or dengue fever. There is such a shortage of medicine that if you get a prescription from the Doctor for 3 pills a day for two months that would be 180 pills you need to recover. You take your prescription to the pharmacy; you receive 10 pills. **Full Stop.** Neighbours would tell the Pastors what medicine they needed, and the Pastors would send out a message and go to collect 1 pill here and 1 pill there, if they could find any.... We heard so many stories just like this. Everyone that we met has lost weight because of illness and lack of food.

We asked Yonail our lead Pastor to tell our Pastors when we visited not to feed us because we did not want them to give us what was in such short supply for them. And knowing the Cuban people they would have given us the last crackers they had.

At the main church in Placetatas however insisted on preparing lunch for us two days, Yonail and Matthew went out to buy soda pop which they hadn't had in two years. Two one litre bottles and three cans of soda pop cost \$29.00 Canadian. We left money for our lunches!!!

Stepping out in Faith

On the Friday we were to stop at Pastor Virgilio and his wife Nolaida but we ran out of time because we had a long way to travel back to the resort and traveling those roads in the dark is dangerous. We stopped by there on Sunday to be told that they both had been diagnosed with Covid on Saturday. Had we gone in on the Friday we would all have been in a precarious situation. The Lord was looking after us.

Stepping out in Faith

Access to the internet is intermittent, when I was able to log on, the first message I saw was that our Sister Liz Postma had passed away. I stood in the main lobby of the resort and broke down crying, Liz was so kind and supportive to everyone. At Westmount the Sunday before we left Liz was the last person to give me a huge hug.

It is in those times when you are far away you realise everything is in God's hands. I was not able to make a meal, lend a hand or grieve with family here - but Liz would have said it's ok you are helping people there in Cuba.

As in all of God's plans I was not alone, Barb one of the team members was with me and a concerned waiter brought us strong coffee and I was able to share with Barb how wonderful Liz was.

Stepping out in Faith.

I was also thankful that we had four days at the end of the mission to rest. We were able to book rooms for our lead Pastor Yonial and his wife Marilyn and Pastor Fernando and his wife Dianna for two days so that they could also rest and meet to carry on the mission of bringing Jesus to the people of Cuba.

There is a plaque beside a tap at Pastor Fernandos's church in Camajuani that provides good clean drinking water to the community it says the following:

Este agua te va satisfacer por hoy Jesus le satisface por le eternidad
? Lo aceptas ?

www.livinginfaith.net

Translated is says:

This water will satisfy you for today - Jesus satisfies you for eternity

Do you accept it?

Thankful that each of our team members had a negative mandatory Covid-19 PCR test result taken before we were allowed to leave Cuba.

I am also thankful for the members of our team of six who encouraged and helped each other when we needed it. To Walter and Barbara for being the brave drivers. To Belinda for keeping track of all the supplies and where they had to go in her head! To Linda for taking the all-important pictures to document our trip. To Matthew for always recognising who needed help and what had to be done.



We were able to be the feet and hands of each of you who supported us from home with your prayers, donations of medicine, funds, and words of encouragement.

To God be the praise and glory.

Stepping out in Faith.

Belinda Jakimczuk 2021



I want to start by saying I so missed our mission trips and going this time just solidified that. Getting everything ready was crazier than ever but we did it. Medicine arrived three days before so that was when all the bags got completely packed (new for me). Of course Satan was there trying to discourage, scare and say all the negative things he could but we kept plugging away, praying for God's grace to get it done. Everything felt so weird, it had been so long since we went and we had no idea how things were going to play out but we did know that God knew and we were in His hands. What I have to keep reminding myself is that we are only called to do what we can and we need to trust God for the rest. So many emotions, excited to see everyone again but not knowing if that was going to happen. We had to plan so if we could not see them they could still get the supplies we had for them. They were working at their end and we at our and God all around it all.

When we booked our flight we had to go to the resort as there were not any other options, and nothing was said as to when things were going to change. I think it was October when it was announced that November 15th things were going to open up in Cuba and we would be able to go and visit (yeah) so we planned to rent cars for 4 days and go. About two weeks before we were to fly, it was announced that things would open up on the 7th (so happy). We would have to have proof of covid insurance and have a pcr test when we got there and one before we came home. We were prepared! We had to fly out of Toronto this time and Nathan Polmeteer was gracious to let us use his van to take our luggage and he and Wilber Marchena drove. We left our van in Toronto for the 2 weeks. Our flight was uneventful and we landed in Cuba around noon. Customs could not have gone any better as we were the first Air Transat flight since covid to arrive and they were all excited and had a big party for us. No one ask for proof of vaccines, covid insurance and we had no pcr test. They took our temperatures (many times) and sent us through. We gathered our luggage and believe me if you knew what was in there you would understand the greatness of this event. Going out of the airport we were met with music, drinks, people dressed in costumes. We got on the bus and headed for the resort.

After a 90 minute ride we arrived, registered and settled in. It had been a very long day and wearing a mask for 12 hours straight was not easy and it was so good to get it off and breathe fresh air.

We enjoyed a day and then we found out we could rent cars already so Walt spoke to the guy and plans were made for us to get them Monday morning at 8:30am and we were off. As we went we realized the car we had was not good and as the day went on things got worse. No speedometer, the car had a hard time going at a good speed, there were noises we knew should not be there and the Cuban roads did

not help. We arrived in Placetas to a big welcome from Yonail, Kenia and Seryesky. It was so good to be able to hug them and be able to talk to them. A big shock when Marcos and Lucus came out to see us. They have grown so much, and looked so different, a bit sad that we missed two years. (Seryesky and Kenia's boys)

It was just like coming home, such a great feeling. We were able to catch up with them and make plans with Yonail for the week and a big change for him, he didn't have to drive but I am sure he wished he was Emoji

It was so good to be able to give them medicine and for the doctors too as well as personal items. In one bathroom I saw rusty razors Emoji, one of the pastor's wives was very happy to have a new tooth brush as hers was pretty flat. One also told us that she attempted to make shampoo but it did not turn out well. Most do not shower as we know a shower as they have little to no hot water so they put the water in a pail along with some that they have heated up, soap up and pour the water over to rinse off.

Nothing easy in Cuba, or you take a cold shower :)

Even with all the new challenges added to their lives, they continue to minister in whatever manner they can and there is still no complaining. It was sad to hear how they lost loved ones and friends, neighbors and members of their churches not just to Covid 19 but to the lack of blood pressure medication, and simple antibiotics. It was wonderful to hear how they went above and beyond during the covid crisis and continued to minister to their people, went out and served to help those who were sick.

People come to their door for help and if they can, they help.

It is sad that those needing three metformin a day get 20 for the month and the next month nothing. We never had metformin before but this time we had a lot and didn't know what we were going to do with it but we had pastors and others that were in great need of it and blood pressure medicine, 10 pills for the month and maybe nothing for two months. Just before we arrived a cardiologist came to talk to one of the pastors crying because they had lost three people that week because of the lack of bp medicine.

There is so much more we could share and I hope we will have a night to do that

Thanks to generous donations we supplied over thirty families with toothbrushes, paste, deodorant, razors, shampoo, bar soap, laundry soap and we made sure they all had tylenol for adults and kids.

Our mission trips are different from most as we are called to love, encourage and equip the pastors so they can go out and make disciples for Christ.

I want to say a big thank you to everyone who contributed to this mission trip with prayer, donations and helping to get it all ready and getting us to the airport. God knows you all by name and He will reward your kindness.

We have an awesome team!

Philippians 4: 13



Walter Jakimczuk 2021

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: (Ecclesiastes 3:1 KJV)

It had been two years since we last visited our Christian brothers and sisters in Cuba. Twice before our planning, purchasing tickets, and preparing was stopped by conditions beyond our control.

Covid 19 had taken over the world.

This time we agreed to go without knowing if we could even have freedom to travel or see our friends. With tickets purchased, bags packed according to needs assessment and with really no solid plan we just went out trusting to meet whatever comes. If we learned anything from our past experience is with everything there has to be flexibility. The team were all experienced, familiar with the unique culture and customs from multiple visits.

From one extraordinary experience to another continually reminding us it is not in our control but in the hands of the Almighty himself. Our part was to trust and obey. More people than we could have ever imagined made this trip an important part of their regular prayers. The confidence we have is nothing would touch us without permission from God.

Once in Cuba, everything intact, and circumstances changing we agreed to go seven days traveling to meet every pastor supported and their families to encourage, equip and to evaluate the what, where, when, and how to make the most impact.

The following is some observations I have made:

“Two years has been too long”

Any pastor with young children we witnessed a great change two years of growth have made.

We could visibly see some Pastors with loss of weight and signs of long term suffering

Most all our pastors and their families were sick with Covid 19 (especially last September)

Many personally know of a number of friends and family (young and elderly) who died of Covid 19.

Most but not all have been double (or more) vaccinated.

All churches have had to change with no “in person” services using WhatsApp, social media or memory sticks.

In spite of these changes, many churches have seen growth during this time.

The location of some churches are in the “Slums” of the big City

All churches in various areas were in various stages of reopening church and related activities.

Many praying and planning what the re start of church would look like.

There are many ongoing health concerns of our Pastors and their families with availability of medicine being one of the main concerns.

With many shortages and inflation out of control many attempt to make their own shampoo, soaps and other necessities. We plan to bring recipes and ingredients next trip.

Finally as we leave Cuba we commit to returning April 2022 with more people, more supplies, and plans of a Pastor and Family Retreat.



Barbara Rawlinson 2021