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The legacy of Pastors for Peace support for Cuba continues

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2008, the caravan at the Mexican border. Photo: Bill Hackwell

For the 32nd time in 30 years a Pastors for Peace caravan is in Cuba bringing close to 100 people including many young people who are experiencing the reality of Cuba for the first time; seeing for themselves instead of through the filter of lies and hate so prevalent in the mainstream media of the U.S..

But the delegation is not just made up of first time supporters but veterans of many of the friendshipment caravans too who accompanied Pastor's visionary leader the Reverend Lucius Walker through all those years of collecting essential material aid for the island in cities and towns all around the U.S.. While tons of aid was delivered it was the explaining the truth about Cuba and its example of what a better world

could look like along the way was what was most important. Walker's message was one of defiance against the cruelty of the blockade, wrapped in love. He said more than once, "our government has no authority to tell us who our friends are. The Cuban people are our brothers and sisters."

The history of the caravans is being carried in the stories of these veterans like Lisa Valenti who accompanied Lucius in 1996 on a 90 day hunger strike in front of Congress to demand the release of Cuba bound computers confiscated at the Mexican border by U.S. agents.

Longtime Pastor's Bus driver Bill Hill is another one who has participated in most of the caravans including many stopped at the border with furious resistance. From the first caravan in 1992 when border agents seized bibles and bicycles from the hands of priests and students to a caravan stopped at the Canadian border and the aid was then defiantly carried by caravanistas box by box to the other side. Other caravans have defied the U.S. ban on sending technology to Cuba containing any more than 10% of U.S. made components in it including satellite dishes and solar panels. In 1993, during the second caravan, a little yellow school bus was seized by Treasury officials and impounded for 23 days, with 13 caravanistas (including Lisa Valenti) inside, at the border town of Hidalgo, in the blistering heat, until an international outcry forced its release. The State Department claimed the little yellow bus could be used for the military when in fact it was meant for a Cuban school for children with disabilities.

In the history of the caravans there always seemed to be another way to break the blockade.

To sum up the determination of these trips of solidarity and love Bill Hill remembered what Lucius once said, "These trucks and buses don't have a reverse, they only go forward to Cuba."

Pastors for Peace's commitment to ending the blockade didn't just focus on their own projects but it has always extended to other Cuban solidarity groups in the U.S. when their support was needed. In 2011, for example, when the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban 5 was organizing a tour of the famed Cuban National Children's Theater Group; La Colmenita in the U.S., there was a need for a bus to transport the children between cities on the East coast and it was Pastors who provided one and Bill Hill drove it.

Cheryl LaBash, co-chair of the National Network on Cuba, is also on this caravan and explained to *Resumen Latinoamericano* why Pastor for Peace decided to launch the friendshipment caravans during the most difficult years of the Revolution.

"At that time it was the 1990s, and the island was going through its worst economic crisis up to that time, known as the Special Period.

Our initiatives were carried out while the administration of then President George Bush (Sr.) was creating all kinds of measures to hinder Cuba's efforts to overcome the crisis. Bush had decided to maintain the fundamentals of the genocidal policy against Cuba, implemented shortly after the triumph of the Revolution of 1959.

On April 6, 1960 Lester D. Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in a secret State Department memo defined the U.S. strategy that continues to this day:

"The majority of Cubans support Castro...the only foreseeable way to detract from his domestic support is by disenchantment and dissatisfaction arising from economic malaise and material hardship...every possible means must be rapidly employed to weaken the economic life of Cuba...a course of action which, being as skillful and discreet as possible, will achieve the greatest advances in depriving Cuba of money and supplies, to reduce its financial resources, to bring about hunger, despair, and the overthrow of the Government."

That prescribed as surreptitiously as possible to create difficulties without the major trading partners of the Eastern bloc and the Soviet Union. And the progressive movement urgently needed to do something from the United States.

Why? Because Cuba and the Cuban Revolution were a symbol of resistance right here in our hemisphere, of constructing a new social order based on human needs, not on profit. So that's why in my opinion, the 1st Caravans were organized and undertaken."

LaBash concluded, "Cuba was never alone and never will be. Pastors for Peace and the new generation of caravanistas will continue the legacy of Lucius Walker and the hundreds of caravanistas who have preceded them for as long as it takes to put this criminal blockade of Cuba into the dustbin of history"

Source: [Resumen Latinoamericano - English](#)

