

No one has traveled more times with the Pastors for Peace Caravans than Bill, “the Cuban.”

By Onelia Chaveco, July 5, 2019

Bill Hill, a 73-year-old American who has visited Cuba 35 times, including 28 as a member of the Caravan Pastors for Peace, calls himself “Bill, the Cuban.”

When I interviewed him, I realized that he has visited more places on this Caribbean island than some of my fellow countrymen, because he speaks with vast knowledge about Guantanamo or Santiago de Cuba, like Havana and Pinar del Río.

Bill is a war veteran turned defender of Peace. "They sent me to Vietnam to kill innocent people when I was a young man, and now they forbid me to come to the Greater Antilles to help people," was his spontaneous claim.

But how did the change from a warmonger to a pacifist happen? I ask this old man, who has planted fruit and grains in the lands of Cienfuegos, during an exchange with farmers.

"When I returned from the war, I became an alcoholic and a drug addict because of the post-war stress I had from those hard years of military life in the jungles of Viet Nam, away from my family. Many people in the United States who were against that conflict were throwing eggs at me. It was very ugly.

"I raised two daughters alone. Today, July is 34 years old and Janet is 29. But as I was using narcotics, I had many problems. My oldest daughter, who was eight years old at the time, said to me: 'Dad, if you continue to use drugs and you die, who is going to take care of us'. Then I went to a cabin with them and stayed there for three months, when I left, I had put all that aside. No more drugs.

"If I did not listen to my daughter, I would be dead. Imagine, every day in the USA, 22 war veterans die because of stress and because they drink and use drugs. I fought to change then so that my daughters would grow up and not live what I lived.

"The first time I contacted Pastors for Peace, I wanted to send bicycle parts to Cuba. The other way I had found was to put those attachments in boxes, put labels on them, and pay 600 dollars to transport them to Tampico.

So I came to talk to the Pastors.

"I did not have a passport, but I could not ignore a group of caravanistas going on a hunger strike, so I came to help. Then 10 days before the end of the fast, Lucius Walker invited me to come with them to Cuba. I did not know anything about Cuba, I had heard they put people against a wall and shoot them, those lies are what they teach us in the United States.

"Bringing a caravan to the island was difficult, so we made friends in Mexico and in 1993 by Tampico we were able to send 96 vehicles by boat; In addition, medicine, wheelchairs, crutches, canes, X-ray machines, computers and many other things.

"In the beginning there was a hunger strike for twenty eight days inside a school bus in Texas, and in 1998 we also went on strike for ninety four days to send computers and medical assistance to Cuba.

"Between 1993 and 2011 we brought some 400 tons of aid, but that assistance was not the important part, because it was only a drop of what this country needs, what was significant was to inform the American people about the Blockade and align them with the struggle against it.

"In 2010 we lost Lucius, and his daughter Gail Walker took the reins, and we made a commitment to never stop working for Cuba.

"We are here now 34 caravanistas but we represent thousands of people who are in solidarity with this island, whose people know how to distinguish and separate the actions of the US government from the solidarity of many people in our nation.

"After so many years of solidarity with Havana, I feel that this is the most important thing I have done. Half of the caravanistas are here for the first time. Many are young people who are the activists of the future. We prepare them so that when we old ones are no longer here, our work has continuity. "

This skinny and tall man, this Don Quixote, spent 28 years driving trucks and now teaches children how to fix bicycles. Finally, he clarifies: "They call me "the Cuban" because, in addition to touring almost all of this island, I consider this land my home, and you, my people."

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