

“I ask my kids to pardon me for not saying good bye to them”

By: Minoska Cadalso Navarro, November 20, 2018

"I could not say goodbye, I left and maybe 20 days from now you, unknowingly, will be awaiting my return. It's not going to happen, so I ask for your forgiveness." So confesses Dr. Arnaldo Cedeño Núñez, who has been caring for the indigenous children of the Aparai -Wayana ethnic group in Brazil since 2016.

"I will never forget that day. It was September 11, 2016. The morning was cloudy. They predicted rain and turbulence. I boarded the plane, traveling from the airport in the city of Macapá in the state of Amapá, in Brazil, to the village of Bona, belonging to the municipality of Almeirim in the state of Pará."

Dr. Arnaldo Cedeño Núñez tries to remember. I feel that he is going back to actually live those moments, which for him were stressful. "I will admit I was afraid. Try to imagine that it was only the pilot and me traveling, and he was giving me instructions in case of an emergency. We would be crossing the Amazon jungle to reach the indigenous community of the Aparai -Wayana ethnic group."

"The journey lasted two hours and was complicated and risky. It was only after a few trips that I began to appreciate the beautiful and almost unspoiled nature of what I saw from the air.

The young doctor is a native of Granma province. I met him through social networks after the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba announced it would no longer continue with the More Doctors Program. In his notes Cedeño included something that said, "Sorry for not having said goodbye!

Who did the Cuban doctor apologize to?

"I left for the indigenous village on the day President Bolsonaro was elected. For two years, every twenty days I had traveled to live with the indigenous people. There was no electricity there, no telephone, and no internet. We only had a television in the health station that worked 2 or 3 hours at night as long as there was enough fuel to feed an electric generator. But at that time the TV equipment was broken and I didn't know about anything that was happening.

"I learned about their culture, their games, their songs, their innocence, I cried when they got sick and it hurt me that their future was confined to the jungle and rivers on which their lives depended.

"Two days before finally leaving the place, I wanted to take a rest in the evening. I placed the hammock outside the health post and lay down there. There was a party in the village. It was then that some children arrived and asked my permission for them to sing me some songs in the indigenous language. I didn't record them, for which I can't

forgive myself. They saved me that day from a cobra bite because they discovered that there was a little snake under the hammock. One of them killed it with his sandal. He was almost barefoot.

For a few seconds, Dr. Cedeño is silent. "I don't know why I had the feeling that something wasn't right, but I didn't realize that I would never see them again. I promised to spend Christmas with them. It's an important day for the Brazilians. I wasn't able to say goodbye. I left and maybe in 20 days they will unknowingly be waiting for my arrival. It's not going to happen, I couldn't say goodbye and for that I apologize".

What do you bring back to Cuba from the indigenous children of the Aparai -Wayana ethnic group?

"I keep with me the best memories of them. For example, when the plane arrived, everyone came up to meet me with their smiling faces. In the beginning they touched me to feel the texture of my skin which they noticed was different ... They were curious and they asked me what ethnic group the Cuban doctor belonged to. So I explained to them that in Cuba we didn't have a chief or tribes."

"One day they inquired about our food and I was very disturbed to learn that they only ate cassava, yucca and fruits. They are malnourished, especially the youngest ones".

I felt emotion in Dr. Arnaldo's voice. He pauses before telling me finally that, "I gave them my love, I taught them to dance, to sing, to understand our culture. My only sadness is not having been able to embrace them when I left.

http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2018/11/20/perdon-a-mis-ninos-por-no-haberles-dicho-adios/#.W_gyLU2ov3h