

Sue Hodes

On my first ever trip to Cuba, I found the people and the island stunning. I felt an inner relax and relief to be around a society where human well-being and healthful choices are the goal of the government and the people. Free universal healthcare - free education. A priority on preventative health – not illness. So logical, so right, but so far from my experience with our U.S. authorities and the corporations that run them based on greed at the expense of “we the peoples” well-being. I was fascinated and inspired by the willingness of the Cuban societal institutions to admit when things went wrong. The Cubans say they recognize many things are trial and error, and are a process – not some fixed unchangeable system or idea. So we now see many small private businesses in the Cuban government’s attempt to raise the economy that all agree is very battered and underfunded. They are trying to insure the small private business owners get similar benefits as state employees around retirement – and at a tax cost of only 1% of income versus the 25% many small businesses must pay in the U.S. They are trying – they admit they aren’t sure how to do it all.

We also see the society talking about lesbian, gay, trans, queer, bi rights in a dramatic change from the 70’- and 80’s. There is even a governmental department for sex education and gender that responded to calls from lesbian groups to take up gay rights. We were able to meet with a lesbian group in Santiago de Cuba that is now getting support from the Federation of Cuba Women (FMC) that a short time ago was not dealing with this issue.

There is no doubt the more than 50 year U.S. blockade – a kind of siege – that prevents U.S. businesses from trading with Cuba is criminal. Even when life saving devices like micro-surgery implements only manufactured in the US are needed – Cuba has no access, and this results in patients- including children – needing, for example, to have full open heart surgery with the breast bone broken – instead of the less invasive micro surgery procedures because of lack of implements. Yet, the Cuban doctors are renowned for their skill and medical advances and actually train medical professionals from all over the world inside Cuba and in other countries. Communication between people – one the major, sane, peaceful tools to enhance our world is prohibited between U.S. and Cuban people by this cruel blockade. As we left Cuba, the right wing Cuban American senator Marco Rubio from Florida succeeded in maintaining his hateful law prohibiting face to face contact between U.S. students and professors from Florida with their Cuban counterparts by people to people visits to Cuba when the Supreme Court decided not to hear the challenge to Rubio’s law. The blockade must be ended.

I was shocked to hear that 3400 people have been killed and many more injured by right wing Cubans from Florida, funded and supported by the US government since the 1959 revolution. We met with the 2 mothers and one wife of 3 of the Cuban Five - five Cuban men who infiltrated right wing Cuban American groups to prevent any more bombings of Cuban hotels or planes as have occurred in the past. These men have been convicted as spies and are serving outlandish sentences in the U.S. when it has been clearly proven that they did not spy on the U.S. government or get any secrets about the U.S. The Cuban five need to be freed.

Cuba has 11 million people. The U.S. has 300 million people and the largest military in the world. We need to keep our hands off Cuba. There is no threat to the U.S. from Cuba. Yes, their society has many issues to be dealt with – there are inequalities – almost no one – workers or professionals receive enough salary because of the perpetual economy crisis. But there sure is the willingness, creativity, energy and good heartedness to progress. I want the US. to leave this tiny country alone and let all Americans who want to see a different attempt at societal structure get to go and see for ourselves. This is the life changing experience I had being part of the U.S. Women and Cuba Collaboration 2012 Delegation.