

Irma: Vignettes from an event!

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In Cuba, there is no other issue today than Irma, the strong hurricane that swept houses, roofs and crops from throughout the country. Irma has left a trail of bad memories and indelible experiences.

Once again, Cubans' idiosyncrasy stayed afloat. The help and collaboration among neighbors, the funny comments about one of the most fearful atmospheric events that have ever hit the country, and the willingness and perseverance to overcome difficulties among all have been present. Now, I leave you with some anecdotes –as vignettes– about my neighbors from a neighborhood in Havana's outskirts. Solidarity, obsession, carelessness summarize some of the behaviors.

Yusmaikel and his "plasma TV set"

"It only took me a tile, I have a hole in the roof, but I'm worried about the "plasma" (flat screen TV) that I bought recently. Ask Irma (coincidentally my neighbor is named like that). She saw it, tell her to tell you the size it has, it's like that window. I'm afraid it gets wet and breaks down".

And the roof?, I ask him.

"That is not my matter for the moment. I will see when it rains. The plasma TV set is the most

important thing. I use it as an atari, I love it, and that entertains me. Irma has already passed, I am not concerned”.

Mercedes’s cookings...

“As I have my sister and my brother-in-love at home, I bought several things to spend these days. I had chicken, some pork beefsteaks and mincemeat in the refrigerator. And in addition, since the mango harvest was good, I also kept some.

“So the lack of electric power made me very tense, and I resorted to cook. I boiled the meats, made croquettes and cooked the fruits, because there was guava too. I have spent the whole cyclone in the kitchen! I hope no one else comes, but if it happens I am not going to keep so many things in the freezer. If lacking is bad, under these circumstances, lightening the refrigerator is better. It’s an experience to face the forthcoming ones”.

Carlos, the truck and taters

Carlos drives a truck that services agriculture. He’s a strong black man, as tall as a palm tree, and perhaps that’s the reason why, backbone pains always beset him. Therefore, when he brings home some taters, he never forgets to share them with those around him.

“Bring me a sack, a bag”, he tells me from time to time, and fills it with sweet potatoes, cassava, or some other seasonal produce.

Irma had gone, but the whole neighborhood had no power and water. The children were playing, adults were awaiting the restoration of power but that moment never came. However, Carlos brought good news. Some neighbors surrounded the track and he offered something to everybody; as if easing their pains. And he accomplished it! A while later, in the middle of the darkness of the night, the savory Creole flavor revealed that locals were cooking more than one “caldosa” (traditional Cuban stew).

Raimundo: Electricist or mason?

He works in an enterprise that offers maintenance to power stations, fixing heavy equipment, such as transformers. But in his spare time, he earns extra money doing masonry works. Few people know he is an electrician, everybody thinks he only has to do with sand and cement.

"Irma" had not arrived yet. It was around 2:00 pm, and Margarita thought there was no power. It happened that there was a short circuit in her house. Someone let Raimundo know it, and he showed up at the old woman’s home quickly. He climbed a stool on a chair and found out that some cables were really burnt. He was about to fall down, the prop was quite high.

He removed the lamp, separated the cables, and when he decided to test, then there was no power already. “Count on me for anything you need—he told the woman—, but do not tell the neighborhood that I am an electrician, because actually I fix big appliances, not small things like this one!

The kitchen door and Gloria

For months, Gloria has been suffering from the kitchen door of her apartment, located in a fifth floor. It didn’t even come to her mind that the cyclone season was about to begin. The door swelled when there was moisture, and in addition it had termite”. In short, it was an issue to be

solved.

She talked to the thousand virgins, as the saying goes, until she finally managed to get one, but very far from her house. The dilemma was how to transport it from Guanabacoa to Arroyo Naranjo, two municipalities of the capital.

That night, during the passing of the hurricane, Gloria and her son spent most of the morning hours holding the door with wood. "What went in through it was a gust of wind". Fear seized them. Changing it was imminent.

After the fearsome cyclone, the boy walked around the neighborhood in search of a vehicle. But as one could figure out, his effort was unsuccessful. He found a truck stopped in front of his building. "Buddy —he said— I give you 5 CUC (convertible currency) if you take me to bring..." The man smiled and told him: "I do not have oil nor where to get it from. Cupets (Cuba's National Oil Company) that have fuels do not have power and vice versa".

Hours later, a phone call made them happy. "Get dressed because I am going there, I think that I can carry the door in my car". So it was, human solidarity solved a problem that seemed to find no happy ending.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamin / Cubasi Translation Staff
