
Talking Files: The Warrior from Jutia Key

03/10/2017



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Victoria Denis Giraldi is the only woman in Cuba and perhaps in Latin America who by the end of the 1900's remain active as lighthouse keeper, after spending almost thirty years spending the nights in keys, capes and islands, in perennial marriage with the heating sun, the dust, the heavy rains and starry and endless nights of the Caribbean.

The lighthouse of Jutía Key, located in Minas de Matahambre municipality, north of Pinar del Rio, not far from the Santa Lucía town, is inaugurated on May 1902 with an unusual metallic structure in the shape of a skeleton and a 43-meter height, ideals to look at the exceptional marine landscapes that surround the area. Of course, it's not as flashy as the Lighthouse of Alexandria, one of the Seven Marvels of the Old World, built in Egypt at the time of Ptolomeos, although as consolation it has Victoria, The Warrior who, as good secluded monk is one of the few ladies who don't see solitude like a bad guide.

As The Warrior tells to Fidel Sagó Arrastre, collaborator of the Guerilla fighter who visits her when she's already retired in Santa Lucía, the giant of Jutía Key, seem from the distance thanks to the brightness of its metallic dome, has the mission of avoiding marine accidents, to detect foreign boats of strange origin or belligerent and raise the alert on possible shipwrecks that may occur in nearby areas. It also shows an impressive record of surviving more than a hundred tropical weather phenomena and it even challenged hurricane Gustav, with a category 4, when it hit Pinar del Rio in 2008 and caused unimaginable destructions for the residents of the province.

This woman, coal miner since she was a girl in the inhospitable San Antonio Cape, the westernmost place of the Island, is a synonym of courage: she stays alone in Jutía for weeks she laughs at the ghost legends of nearby residents; she rows a lot the seven kilometers that separate the key from mainland and, every day, she climbs up and down twice a day the more than a hundred steps of the lighthouse tower. On top of that, a merit of more bravery: for years she carries out permanent tracking by land and sea earth, with a rifle on her shoulder, hunting

CIA agents, smugglers, saboteurs and other filibusters.

Already an elder, The Warrior shows gray- hair and many bags on her back. A few years ago, when Sagó interviewed her, she lived next to her three daughters in a humble house, where the scent to spring roses never faded completely. In her living room, filled with old portraits and old furniture, you can see the Shield of Pinar del Rio, with which the government of the province awards its prodigal children. According to the indiscreet winds of the rains, the woman still worships those who loved her with the passion of storms and she takes a bath with the large bowls she used to lessen the lack of drinking water in Jutía Key. And there are still who speaks of the so-called fair sex!

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