

Fidel at home



“Treat me like one of your own” Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro once told Cuban journalists, on another occasion writing that being among them felt like being among family. Such statements, made by someone who has always professed an unwavering respect for the truth, and profound distain for demagoguery, express a genuine sincerity, especially when we remember that communication and the press were an intrinsic part of Fidel’s political activity, which began at an early age.

This family continued to grow around the revolutionary leader starting with the comrades that worked alongside him on radio broadcasts in his days at Radio Rebelde in the Sierra Maestra, to the revolutionary press which developed after the triumph of the Revolution on January 1, 1959, spreading to other latitudes with Operation Truth that same year; it also included colleagues who worked in television; strengthened and expanded by the efforts of all to combat U.S. imperialism and the corporative media in Cuba, opposed to the social measures being implemented.

At transcendental moments during Cuba’s revolutionary process, it was however at Granma where Fidel simultaneously conveyed his directives – in the form of editorials, articles and news reports – to the leadership of mass organizations, state institutions, and the people. A former colleague, Juan Marrero vividly recalls one of these moments, which saw him take on a leading role in an intense nationwide mobilization led by Fidel from Granma, in solidarity with the sister people of Peru, victims of a devastating earthquake in 1970.

Fidel entitled one of the two editorials he wrote regarding the tragedy, "Blood needed to help Peruvians." In the other article published 10 days later, he reported that Cubans had made 104,594 voluntary blood donations. The country's political leadership also turned to Granma to address other exceptional situations, for example following the events which occurred as a result of the incident at the Peruvian Embassy in Havana in May 1980, which sparked mass protests by the revolutionary Cuban people and ended with the government authorizing citizens to leave the island from Mariel bay.

The Granma family learned many valuable lessons in ethics, history, politics and journalism from the Comandante en Jefe. For me, perhaps the most important of all, given its drama and impact on the nation, and the fact that it constitutes a prime example of Fidel's strength of character, was when he officially announced that the 10 million ton sugar harvest of 1970 had not been met.

Fidel arrived at the paper at midnight and typed the word "Defeat" in red ink on the back of a press dispatch. This was the headline he proposed for the next edition. Those of us present didn't share the same view of the day's top story, having witnessed his colossal personal effort and that of the national campaign involving millions of Cubans who, despite failing to reach the goal, produced the largest sugar harvest in the country's history.

We disagreed citing various reasons, but he was decided. He argued, with brutal honesty, that the previous day, following the rescue of a group of fishermen kidnapped by a terrorist faction, the almost half-a-page headline on Cuba's main newspaper had read "Victory." We hadn't been able to convince him by the time he left the editing room.

Later that May morning of 1970, Fidel returned and said: "We're going to change the headline." The front page of the May 20th edition was informative, bold and fair. The article was appropriately self-critical and defiant: "We will not reach 10 million tons." "We have worked so hard for this; we have devoted our last atom of energy, thought, and feeling to this endeavor, and the only thing I have left to say to any Cuban, to he or she who feels deeply hurt by this news, is that this pain is the same pain we all feel, and the same pain felt by all our comrades."

"More courage and bravery than ever!" He concluded with a thought that would guide future actions: "We must have the revolutionary integrity to turn defeat into victory."

In those years the Granma daily was composed of a larger team than the one we have today, including typesetters, printers and distribution staff, responsibilities which would later be assumed by other entities.

Many members of staff knew Fidel from his former links with important media outlets and presence in the printing press, where the young revolutionary would chose the letter-sizing for the headlines of his articles.

Years later, as President, he continued to visit this important which no longer exists due to modern technology; where he would greet old acquaintances and ask them about their working conditions and health, speaking with them at length, just like old friends. I remember Silvio Rayón who came from Alerta, a daily that published important works by Fidel; and also the editorial staff, who were his colleagues at Radio Rebelde, such as Jorge Enrique Mendoza, editor of the paper, Ricardo Martínez and Orestes Valera. Other witnesses to those nights and early mornings, such as copy editors, photographers, cartoonists, correctors, designers, managers, secretaries and archive staff have special stories, anecdotes and memories of their encounters with this exceptional man, leader of the people and one of the greatest revolutionaries in history, who on his 90th birthday remains faithful to his principles, ideas and an example of someone committed to working for the benefit of others.

Author:

- [Páez, Tubal](#)

Source:

Granma International
12/08/2016

Source URL: <http://www.fidelcastro.cu/en/articles/fidel-home>