Alina’s Story

Alina Fernández was born in Havana, Cuba on March 19, 1956. She would tell you that growing up in Cuba, as a child, was very much like growing up in the United States. Every morning, she would get out of bed and turn on the T.V. to watch her favorite show, Mickey Mouse™. Alina lived with her mother, Naty, and her father, Orlando. She also said she remembers her father being busy a lot and having visitors to their house, most every night.

One of the visitors caught her attention, as he was almost always the loudest and seemed to be the focus of everyone’s attention. She did not know this person except for the visits to her house. From what she could tell, this mystery man was a friend of her mother. She noticed that her mother always seemed happy to see him whenever he stopped by. Then, the visits stopped for a while.

One morning, Alina awoke to watch her favorite television show, Mickey Mouse. There he was, up to his usual antics. Then, all of the sudden, the screen went blank. Mickey was gone. She sat in waiting for over an hour, wondering when Mickey would come back. After a while, a man appeared on the television. To her shock and amazement, it was her mystery man visitor. She could not remember a thing he said, all she remembers is the massive shouting of “Free Cuba!” She would not see Mickey again.

That morning was New Year’s Day in 1959. The rebels in Cuba had just recently taken over the government. The Cuban President, Batista, had fled the country during the night before to avoid capture. The mystery man that Alina remembers visiting her house late at night was none other than Fidel Castro, the leader of the Cuban Revolution and eventual leader of Cuba.

During the years that followed, her life became more and more complicated. From that moment on, everyday her house had visitors. When Alina woke for school when she was 8, there would be a line around the block of people waiting to see Alina and her mother. People would beg them to help them. “I have no food!” “My child is sick and needs medicine!” “My father has been out of work!” All of them were crying for help, hoping that Alina would pass along their message to Fidel Castro.

Alina remembers that experience being very traumatic. She said she was constantly approached by strangers crying for help. Even if she wanted to, she was powerless to help. Alina would become very depressed being exposed to the strangers’ tragedies, feeling powerless to help them.

As she got older she became critical of the government in Cuba. She would try to use her influence to get Castro to change certain policies, but she was always disappointed in how things were going in Cuba. Fearing Cuba’s collapse, she arranged for false documents so she could leave Cuba forever. Alina knew leaving would mean that she would never see her mother, siblings, or friends again. However she had made up her mind. It was a great risk leaving Cuba. It took careful planning and months of planning. She knew that if she was caught, the consequences would be dire.

In 1993, at age 37, Alina boarded a boat while disguised as a tourist, and left Cuba for Spain. Alina lives in Miami today. She has a radio show called Simplemente Alina (Simply Alina). She tells her story, hoping to inspire other Cuban refugees.

*Information in this article was provided by Aliana Fernandez, who spoke at Eureka College in the fall of 2013. As this story is a narrative instead of information text, some information has been interpreted and may not fully reflect the situation in all aspects and details. Some portions of this story have been paraphrased and dramatized. Additional information about Alina can be found on Wikipedia. This article is intended to be used for educational purposes only.*