



## The Day I Met Jim Abernathy

By Maria Hendrickson

I met Jim Abernathy on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1994, the day he celebrated his 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in AA. He was on a business trip to Havana and had come to a meeting at the first AA group founded in Cuba just over a year before. The group's name was Grupo Sueño (Dream), my homegroup, where I had found sobriety 7 months earlier. Jim was invited to qualify. I had never heard a speaker that had so many years in recovery. It gave me hope that maybe one day I could reach that milestone. After the meeting, Jim stayed to talk with a handful of AA members. We invited him to join us the following day at a meeting being held with a group of family doctors. It was the first Information Meeting that representatives of the Cuban AA chapter were having with the medical profession and I was humbled when they asked me to speak as a recovering alcoholic woman. It was a great meeting where many doctors heard for the first time about the AA program of recovery.

Jim was visiting Cuba with his wife Kevin. They were staying at the hotel Nacional, where I joined them the following day for dinner. After dinner Jim and I sat at the lobby for a brief conversation. Jim told me about Caron, a premier addiction treatment center in Pennsylvania, where 15 years before he was admitted for treatment of his advanced alcoholism. After completing treatment, he had stay connected to Caron, the place that he gave credit for saving his life. As a Caron alumn Jim took advantage of any opportunity he came across to be of service. At the time he was chairman of the Board of Trustees, a responsibility he held for several years. Jim shared he had come to Cuba to offer the Cuban doctors the opportunity to be trained on the latest chemical dependency treatment modalities at Caron. The plan was simple: bring the doctors to Caron for several weeks, train with world class specialists in chemical dependency and return to Cuba with hopefully a few more tools to help their patients. Unfortunately, the Cuban government was not interested in this generous offer. While denying the Cuban doctors the opportunity to interact with their American colleagues, the Cuban Secretary of Public Health, suggested to Jim that he could extend this offer to someone in AA who could benefit from being trained in the United States. Jim immediately saw this suggestion as an opportunity to bring world class treatment to Cubans who suffered from substance abuse disorders.

That was the day that my connection to Caron began. It was Jim who offered me the chance to come to the States and be trained at Caron. It was Jim who trusted my commitment to utilize what I learned to help other suffering addicts. My debt of gratitude towards this extraordinary man, Jim Abernathy, my mentor and friend, will live as long as I live.