

“Contigo en la distancia”: The challenge of a love in times of Covid-19

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**Via Borsellino, Turin, Piedmont, Italy:** He wakes up early and connects to the Internet, and looks forward the usual morning email from his wife, where she tells him about the day before. He emails her back before going to work at the Major Restoration Office, a gallery turned into a hospital for coronavirus patients.

He works in two, six-hours shifts; firstly, (8:00—14:00, one day) and then (14:00—20:00, other day) in addition to a twelve-hour on duty service at the hospital (20:00—8:00), on the forefront of this fight against the new coronavirus, at a facility where he confirms all the conditions are in place (feeding, hygiene) plus a disinfection area equipped with hot shower rooms to be used as soon as they get out of the Red Zone.

The work is hard especially when you have to put on the protective coat within the Red Zone individually. You struggle with the heat as the coats are hermetically sealed, described the Specialist in Comprehensive Medicine and second-year resident in urology, Samuel Isaac Prada López, one of the Cuban health collaborators working in the international mission in the European nation.

**La Giralilla, La Lisa, Havana, Cuba:** Still in bed, she connects to the Internet looking for her husband’s email. This is a tradition they set when he worked in the Popular Republic of Angola.

She spends the rest of the day doing her housework: cleaning, gathering up, feeding their two children (who do not stop eating!). But her time is cautiously planned to talk to Samuell in her spare time.

I do everything as fast as possible to be ready to applaud doctors at 21:00hrs. Then I care for my children until they fall asleep. Later, I write an email to my husband where I let him know how much we love and miss him, said Geidy Arias Sánchez, Specialist in Comprehensive Medicine and Gastroenterology. She stays at home with Samir (6) and Salma (1).

This couple stays strong — they have been married for nearly eight years now — despite being 8.000+ miles away from each other or the six hours gap between the two of them, or how long they have been away from each other (since April, 12).

Social networks and common friends witness how they try to surprise each other to fuel their common love, as it happened last April 23, when they celebrated 11 years of love relationship, when Samuell took advantage of a viral challenge and sent her a message with the aid of other Cuban collaborators...

“Geydi, my love, despite the distance, our love will prevail forever. We will be soon together. I Love You. Congratulations.”



Proudly, the doctor details that his wife was speechless for at least five minutes filled with emotion. But Geydi, who thought “there was no way to match such a loving action,” recorded a congratulation video with

their children, six hours in advance, so Samuell could watch it in the early hours of May 12, his birthday.

We have been always romantic since our relationship began when we were majoring the fifth school year. This is the sort of love that makes this feeling lasts forever, even now that we have children. It is paramount for married couples. I still treasure the love notes he wrote me when he was my boyfriend. She said Samuell knew about his trip to Italy the same day of her birthday, but he did not say a word until the next day.

The doctor went on a mission to Angola in 2014 and left behind Samir with only four months old. He returned home three years later. That is why “we decided to have another baby once I ended my specialty so there were no more interruptions as we could not miss our children’s development.” She is happy both could celebrate Salma’s first year old together (April 1).

“When Samuell knew he had been chosen to the mission, we were concerned because Samir is still a little boy, but then the educator in the kindergarten told him about coronavirus in a tale-like story, where there were superheroes healing people and then I said his dad was one of those superheroes.

“He now waits every night at 21:00hrs to give his round of applause for daddy and said loudly: Long live Cuba doctors! Long live my dad who is working in Italy! Salma, she is too little, does not know nothing. But as soon as she hears his voice, she looks for him of the phone and plays hide and seek with him.”





The Cuban doctor praises the support of his family, especially his wife's, "she is the one suffering more this distancing," but he is also grateful to his parents-in-law, his parents, his brother. "Without the family's support, no collaborator could feel satisfied while doing his/her duty. I strongly believe the warmth and spiritual strength family provides you is the most important thing."

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