

Arlette Díaz: Being a mother challenging distance and pandemic

By: Lys Alfonso Bergantiño / Special for CubaSí
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Arlette became the mother of Alexa Eimy on December 2, 2019 at the Eusebio Hernandez hospital, in Havana. By then, the world still behaved in a frenzy manner — people gathered fearless; people kissed and hugged. Life was seemingly normal. At the birth room, Jorge Luis debuted as a loving father experiencing that swirl of emotions as a result of the anxiety and enjoyment only felt by those who wait for the greatest of things.

On May 2, 2020 Alexa was 5 months-old. She already has her own language. She is already grumbling and laughing; she holds tight, and cries for help. There are no hugs, nor kisses. Being quiet is the best way to survive. Jorge Luis is only 26. He belongs to the International Health Brigade Henry Reeve and left behind his greatest love to rescue the world.

“He immediately accepted it. He did not know where. So we were just waiting as he could be summoned at any time,” said his wife Arlette Rivas Díaz, who stayed home fighting another war in charge of the house and baby Alexa Eimy.

“It was hard to know he was going to Turin, departing from Cuba with no return date. But his duty as a doctor was essential, especially now that there is a life-threatening pandemic. I always stayed positive. Actually, I still am. It was tough. I cannot deny it. But I felt he needed my support because it was going to be harder to him. In fact, he was to be away from his daughter.”

Arlette is now 24. She also works for the Cuban health system as she majors in Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation. Her husband Jorge Luis Arenas Font, Dr. in Comprehensive Medicine, departed last April to Italy as part of the second health brigade that went there to help fight COVID-19 in a nation heavily impacted by the current pandemic.

“We had never been distant with each other before. This is our first time and I say it is incredible. Being a mother is completely new for me and requires a lot of efforts and sacrifice, which I do with absolute love.

I have changed my routines so everything works out well, as she deserves. I also have the unconditional support of my mom. She works in the health system as well and had to change her schedule to help me out. My parents-in-law remain also in contact with me every day.”

To Jorge Luis, receiving calls from Arlette is balsamic amid this longing for his family and country. In video calls and text messages he checks his wife is safeguarding the fortress well in her new mom role on the other side of the planet.

“We talk about his daily work, the number of patients, the number of

discharges. I asked him if he already lunched, had dinner. But above all, I asked him to take all precautions needed because there are lots of people waiting for him here. Meanwhile, he advises me to protect ourselves, the baby. But he knows she is in good hands and misses us very much.”

“The girl is too small yet. That is why I usually show her pictures of him and tells her: look, he is daddy. What are you going to say daddy when he comes back home? And she recognizes him when she sees him in video calls. She even laughs. You get to know babies as they grow older. Everything they do is amazing. I always do my best so he does not miss a thing, not even the slightest detail.

Soon after he arrived in Turin, in one of his first days off, Jorge Luis met an 87-years-old woman — tested positive to Covid-19 — who expressed her love for Cuba, especially Santiago de Cuba, Camaguey, and Havana. He showed his gratitude by taking his hand to his heart. Dr. Jorge Luis will bring all of his stories home once he returns.

As the young mother states: “it is an honor for Cuba that other nations in the world trust their health personnel. Cuban health professionals are worthy of respect and admiration both at home and abroad. They have a great sense of humanism and solidarity. They put their own life at risk to save others, no matter gender, race, or origins. As they people have labeled all of them: they are heroes in white coats.”

There is no much room for nostalgia in Arlette’s routine. Memories and uncertainty embrace her at times, but she remains strong and optimistic because being a wife, mother, and professional generally imply being the heart of everyone.

“I miss watching him play with her, hold her, put her to sleep. Perhaps that is what I miss the most. The first thing I am going to tell him when I see him is that I love him. I will never get tired of it. Then, I will tell him

that I am very proud he accepted the mission the Revolution trusted him to carry out, just as other health professionals did.”

Jorge Luis and Arlette know their sacrifice is a vivid example of humanism and solidarity. They trust daddy will be back home soon with his mission accomplished. And Alexa Eimy, any given December 2, will enjoy her family together, celebrating love and life.

Translated by Sergio A. Paneque Díaz / CubaSí Translation Staff
