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Land for Victoriano

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Sixty years ago Fidel Castro signed the Agrarian Reform Law in Cuba. It was a true turning point for many farmers, who for the first time owned the lands they tilled. Among them, Victoriano Cabrera.

Victoriano Cabrera – farmer, father of seven, a circumstantial employee in sugarcane colonies at Violeta sugar factory in the former province of Camagüey- knew that Fulgencio Batista had fled at noon on the first day of 1959.

He had spent the whole morning plowing a small lot of land next to his house, despite festivities for the New Year. His brother-in-law and neighbor Melo brought him the piece of news: "Batista fled on a plane. No one knows who governs now ».

Victoriano reined the oxen to stop, wiped his forehead and hugged his friend: "Now Fidel is going to govern."

Melo was not sure: "The military won't let him. Nothing is going to change for us. Poor will remain just as poor and rich will become richer. "

Something told Victoriano that this time it was different:

*-I think that will change. Those people in the hills are different. Fidel Castro is going to put things in order.*

*-See that there are many things to be fixed ...*

*-I say that you and I very soon are going to have lands, we will not depend on the colonists any longer...*

*-Seeing is believing...*

They saw and believed. Just a few months later, Fidel Castro signed the Agrarian Reform Law. The large land

owners suffered a deadly blow ... and thousands of poor farmers received for their first time land for their source of revenue.

"The land belongs to he who tills it!" Repeated Victoriano over and over in those days. He was given 84 hectares of lands that belonged to a private company. They were covered with grass, but he was not afraid. He and two of his children, in less than a month, everything was tilled and planted.

Victoriano decided not to return to work on the cane again, it was just a few-months job, those of harvest. «Fallow period was over. Now there is work all the time! "

For thirty years, while he had his little farm, he planted and harvested corn, beans, sweet potatoes, yucca, peanuts ... His wife, Ana Luisa, tended a small vegetable garden, where she grew tomatoes, lettuce, cabbages, peppers ...

They never starved again: they sold part of the harvest to buy what they needed. Soon they had radio, refrigerator, sanitary service... and one day, finally, a TV set, which was Ana Luisa's dream.

«Who was going to imagine that I was going to be able to watch movies sitting in my living room?»

Victoriano did not want his children to stay working the land, although one of them decided to do it. The youngest went to study, they became professionals.

"What's important is that you work in the things you want and can do. My life is this land that Fidel gave me, other people's lives is just their own business».

In the late 80's, Victoriano decided to sell his land to the State, in exchange for a life annuity for Ana Luisa.

He just kept 21 hectares of land: "Enough to eat." He worked in the field until he was eighty-five years old. Then his children moved him to town, because they wanted to keep him close.

Victoriano cried very few times in his life, but the day he left the house where he had lived for more than half a century he could not hold back the tears.

«I hope they don't let this get filled with marabou». He got on a truck and never came back.

Until the day of his death, when he was 92 years old, he remembered the day he was given his land:

"Melo believed that Fidel was not going to keep his word, but I always trusted that man."

He kept his membership card of ANAP as a treasure: "I was born a peasant and a farmer I am going to die, even though I finish my life away from my farm".

Victoriano Cabrera, whom everyone called Victorino affectionately, was my grandfather on my mother's side. And his greatest entertainment was to tell me stories of his life.