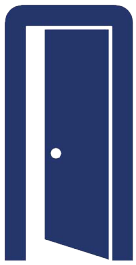

Footnotes

Part two

by

Pamela Johnson

In this second excerpt from a longer work in progress, Pamela Johnson continues the story of her accident while on holiday in Cuba alongside reflections on why the pursuit of healthcare remains central to the island's history

Sunday 6 December 2015

'I'm okay,' my voice tells David, though I'm not okay at all. 'I'll be fine now I'm in bed.' My foot is elevated on pillows, with a pack of ice draped across it, as instructed. Thanks to Tricia and the image on her phone of her metal-reinforced ankle I am keenly aware how crucial ice and elevation is. If the ankle swells too much I will be in for a long stay in hospital.

'I must make a start if we're going to catch the flight tomorrow. And I need to see if we can keep the room. They say it's booked – a party arriving today.' He can't sit still, agitated and eager to make something happen, shock propelling him into overdrive. He's taken on the challenge to find how to make the six-hour journey to Havana with me unable to walk and in time to catch our flight to London tomorrow evening.

'Really. You go.' Please stay.

He gives me the remote for the TV we've never watched in the four days here. I switch it on. Some satellite channel from Florida – adverts for triple-decker burgers, outsized pizzas, Hershey bars, dog grooming kits, cat treats.

I have this split-screen mental image: Oxford Street with Christmas shoppers anxiously buying alongside ration shops in Havana.[i] I switch off the TV and doze.

ration shop, Havana

When I wake, David isn't back. I need the loo. I tamp down panic by mentally planning a route to the bathroom. I wriggle off the bed onto my left leg. The tiled floor is potentially slippery and my recovering sprained foot too weak; hopping is out of the question. By hanging on to walls and furniture, I use the shiny floor to ease into a one-footed swivel action. I make it as far as the walk-in closet – half way – is it wise to carry on? Only a few feet to go but it feels like miles.

Though I make it to the bathroom and back, it's exhausting and dangerous.

I need wheels.

When David returns he's smiling.

'Good news – we can stay another night. *And,* I've hired a wheelchair.'

Through the numbness, a ripple of relief.

'It looks like we'll be travelling to Havana first thing tomorrow.'

The medical emergency company, CEGA – part of our travel insurance – will arrange transport.

'We'll catch our flight?'

'That's the plan but there's paperwork to do.'

If we stand any chance of boarding that plane, it seems, I'll need a certificate of fitness to fly.

'Here, hold this.' He hands me my x-ray and gets out his phone. We try different angles until he snaps a decent close-up of the damage. He then shifts the ice pack for a shot of the cast. He'll email these images to CEGA, so I might be assessed by medical staff in England.The time difference could work in our favour. They'll have had more Monday than us by the time we wake tomorrow. Our fate could be decided by a GP in Chichester.

Exhausted, David climbs into bed even though it's not yet nine. We almost daren't speak. There can be no giving in to doubt or fear. No panic allowed. All energy is to go towards getting on an aeroplane without further mishap. Sleep is what we need if we're to be in a fit state for the taxi ride, which CEGA has confirmed will

collect us at 11am Monday morning which is tomorrow. I need to remind myself what day it is. This Sunday seems to have gone on for a week.

Lying on my back is simplest though I prefer to sleep on my side but the best I can manage is a half turn before the bones click and shift even within the cast. Try not to mind, you'll soon be on a flight to London. The phone rings on David's side. Sleepily he reaches to answer it.

'Okay. I see,' he's saying. His tone is downbeat. 'The airline won't carry you.'

'What?'

'It's a rule, apparently. You can't fly within 48 hours following a fracture.'

'So we'll miss our flight?'

'The taxi will still take us to Havana,' he explains and that, at least, feels like progress. 'They're trying to find a hotel near the airport where we can stay tomorrow night and have a Cuban doctor issue a certificate of fitness to fly.'

'But what about the pictures you emailed to England?'

'I don't know.' He sounds weary, deflated. 'I get a different story each time I call, never speak to the same person.'

There is so much pressure on flights in and out of Cuba but I daren't ask how we'll get another one.

Monday 7 December

Waking, I remember all over again the fall that didn't happen, can't be real. As I ease myself into sitting the clicking confirms what is real – managing the practicalities of a six-hour journey on the back seat of a taxi. That's what's real today. It could be okay if we can take the wheelchair.

The phone rings. David reaches a sleepy hand to the bedside table.

'Yes. Yes. She's here. When? Why? Okay.' He gives them my mobile number and hangs up.

'What?'

'We're not going today. There are no rooms available anywhere near the airport in Havana.'

'Why my number?'

'Someone from the medical team in England needs to interview you. They'll call later to assess if you could manage a flight.'

'But which flight? And will the hotel let us stay another night?' Tourism is booming. December is high season. Hotels are full, flights overbooked.

I know this because yesterday, we spoke to a young tour guide, Mateo, about the pressures he was under, more so since President Obama's recent visit. I told him of our surprise at seeing the Stars and Stripes raised on the US Embassy in Havana. European companies are vying to build hotels in Havana and on the Cayos. 'But we will have to do it slowly,' said Mateo, 'it's a risk. Tourism must develop on Cuban terms. Otherwise what were the last 50 years for?' Mateo, late 20s, has a masters degree in medical psychology but now earns more in tourism. Though Obama's visit raised hopes about removing the US blockade it continues to stifle trade. Because of

this, a regular 'export' from the island since the 1960s has been healthcare. For example, in 2006, funded by Venezuelan oil, a programme of cataract operations was delivered throughout South America. It's reported that in Bolivia, treatment by a Cuban doctor restored the sight of an elderly man who hadn't been able to see for years. It emerged this former soldier had been on the firing squad that executed Ché in 1967.[ii] Teams of Cuban medical professionals continue to be available for the World Health Organisation. During the 2014-15 Ebola crisis Cuban teams were among the first to respond, helping to lower mortality rates and initiate preventative measures against the spread of the disease. Apparently, this work on Ebola had impressed Barak Obama[iii] who, on his historic visit to Havana in 2014, praised Cuba's medical achievements, nationally and internationally, suggesting the two countries might find a way to co-exist, 'There is no need to treat those who think differently as your enemy,' he said. The next president had a different view.

David spends most of Monday morning in the hotel reception area where wifi is strongest and he can make international calls. Back in the room I get washed and dressed which takes a good while. Then I sit in the wheelchair with my phone sending expensive 4G texts and emails – things I must cancel, reassurance to the family.

The incoming call is from a nurse.

'Where are you right now?' Her voice pleasant, up-beat.

'In the hotel room in a wheelchair.'

'Can you stand?'

'Yes, on my left leg but not for long and not without support.' I don't say I'm terrified of falling. I must pass this test.

'Could you manage to get down the aisle of a plane?'

'Yes,' I say weakly then muster an eager voice. '*Yes*.' I see myself, progressing by sheer will power along the length of a 747. 'I could hold on to seats either side and hop on my left leg.' This seems to satisfy her. I don't mention the recovering ankle. That left ankle must buck up. It's had enough pampering. It's the only leg I've got to stand on.

Shortly after this David returns. He's up-beat too.

'Paris, Madrid or Amsterdam?' he asks, excited as if offering a fantastic city break. There are no seats on direct flights to London until next week, by which time my ankle will be too swollen for surgery.

'But what about the certificate?'

'Here.' He shows me an email with the certificate attached, sent by the Chichester GP. I've passed!

The Amsterdam option isn't until Wednesday and Madrid seems too far from London, so we settle on Air France to Paris tomorrow night.

'But how will we get to Havana?'

'They're trying to find an ambulance. If not it'll be a taxi. *Don't worry*. We're getting there. Juan is on the case.'

'Juan?'

David now has a direct line to Juan who is to be our dedicated contact, assigned to us until the dots from here to London join up.

I toy with watching TV but I've had enough *Seinfeld*.

Don't worry. In an attempt not to, I make a list in my notebook.

Ten reasons to be cheerful:

1. It happened on the last day of the holiday
2. Alex was so calm and wasted no time in getting help
3. Belkis was on hand to translate
4. The swift action and kindness of Dr Carlos
5. There was an x-ray machine 7k away
6. The kindness of Dr DIY willing to help on his day off
7. We have credit cards and mobile phones
8. I have a wheelchair
9. We have robust travel insurance
10. David is here to look after me, and keep in touch with CEGA and has bonded with Juan

By Monday afternoon new flights are booked. But there's a glitch: the Air France connection to London leaves us with a long wait at Charles De Gaulle.

'We won't be home till late evening,' says David.

Home. What will that be like? It's all stairs.

David finds a better connection with British Airways and Juan changes the flight from Paris to London.

'And the ambulance?'

'Not looking good. It will have to be the taxi.'

Somehow the numbness of shock has kept panic at bay but the thought of a six hour ride in the back of a car made before 1959, however lovingly restored, has me on the brink of a major wobble with all of me feeling as fragile as my ankle.

taxi rank, Havana

I know what I'm doing in this room, have it all mapped out, I'm adept with the wheelchair. Yes, yes, but you also want to get home. *Break it down*, a kind voice in my head whispers to the old cliché – *a journey of a thousand miles etc etc*

A journey in seven stages[iv]

1. getting out of the room down 2 lots of steps
2. six hour road journey to Havana in a 1950s taxi – food? loos? wheelchair?
3. Transfer to Havana-Paris flight
4. 10 hour flight through the night – foot elevated above heart.
5. Transfer to Paris-London flight
6. flight to London with leg elevated – how on small plane?
7. Heathrow to home? or A & E at The Whittington?

Think not of the taxi but simply the next stage on the list. Getting down steps is impossible. I will have to be carried. Who will do that? The taxi driver? David?

Move on to No 2. Can the hotel provide sandwiches? Could I somehow squat by the road? I look around the room. Two ice buckets, one large, one small. Would the smaller one be missed? Plus the 2 spare loo rolls from the bathroom.

We settle down for an early night. There's a final call from Juan.

'That's it. No ambulance,' David reports as he hangs up. The taxi will be here at nine. Belkis will come to help. We'll get a packed lunch.' And, we can't take the wheelchair, there's no way it could be returned to Dr Carlos's clinic, and wheelchairs are in short supply. We were lucky to get one.

'I've been wondering, do you think it would be okay to take the ice bucket? I mean, six hours … '

I talk David through the mechanics of this.

Ice bucket and loo rolls are squeezed into hand luggage.

Tuesday 8 December

Awake from 5.30 am, I won't sleep again. Instead, I doze planning how to get out of this room to the taxi. I play various scenarios in my head; all end in further injury.

The phone rings. It's not yet six. I nudge David awake and he takes the call.

'Juan,' he mouths in reply to my questioning face.

At this time in the morning it can only mean bad news. No taxi? Flight cancelled? I don't want to hear this and consider putting fingers in ears. Despite all the ice and elevation, how much longer will my ankle resist swelling beyond the possibility of surgery? What internal damage are those wayward bones doing?

'Thanks, thanks so much. We'll be ready,' says David and hangs up. 'They've found an ambulance. It's on its way! Juan says to be ready by 8.30.'

The next couple of hours are filled with purpose. David goes to find us some breakfast. I pull on a sleeveless linen shift and strap a sturdy walking sandal on my good foot.

When Belkis arrives to tell us the ambulance is here, she and David line up the luggage. I sit in the wheelchair watching the activity and grip its blue metal frame, reluctant to let go of my security, my one bit of independence.

Once the luggage is loaded a stocky man in shorts and white t-shirt appears. He is not tall but broad, a big man no more than forty, with a big smile.

'Martez,' the man says and points to himself.

'Hello, I'm Tamara,' says the woman with him who is a nurse in uniform! Like Martez she too has a warm smile and a calm presence.

'Ready?' asks Belkis and she turns to speak rapidly in Spanish to Martez. Tamara encourages me to stand on my good leg.

'Okay?' she asks as she steadies me.

'Thanks, but what about the stairs?'

Without another word, Martez scoops me into his arms, carries me down the three steps from the bedroom to the threshold of the room like a reverse honeymoon gesture, and then effortlessly down six steep steps to where a trolley waits. He shows no strain as if I were no more than the weight of a small bundle. Parked a few meters away is a very smart ambulance. Martez gently deposits me to sit on the trolley.

'Okay?'

I'm so grateful I can hardly speak.

'Relax' says Tamara and encourages me to lie flat.

I'm wheeled to the rear of the vehicle where a ramp appears. In one smooth movement I'm on board. My trolley takes up one side of the space inside, along a window and I'm high enough to see out.

'You want sit?' asks Tamara and raises the back of the trolley so I can be upright – I might be on a sun lounger.

To the side of my trolley are two seats, of the sort air hostesses sit on when the plane takes off. There is a third member of the crew.

'This Peter,' says Tamara. Peter yawns, and does not look happy. He does not smile. He takes up his seat and puts on his seat belt. I don't think I'm imagining his hostility.

Belkis explains that have come from near Varadero, which is 2 hours from Havana on this side of the city. They've been on the road for hours already.

'Hello,' I say to Peter. He shrugs and scratches his arm and the back of his neck.

'*El zancudo*,' says Tamara.

I look blank.

'*Zancudo*, er er *zancudo* is …' she mimes the trajectory of a mosquito. It seems he has acquired the bites coming here to mangrove territory.

Poor Peter, sleep deprived and suffering from bites. He looks at me as if I might be just another mosquito. I don't blame him for being pissed off. Added to his discomforts there doesn't even seem to be a role for him and now he must sit for hours and repeat a journey he's just done. Perhaps they are a team and need always to go where the ambulance goes. He wears a uniform – a paramedic?
Well, Tamara and Martez outnumber him.

David does a final check of the room and comes to see me.

'This looks cosy,' he jokes.

He will travel up front with Martez who turns out to be the driver.

Belkis makes sure I have my hand luggage within reach and gives me a carrier bag which contains a generous packed lunch then waves us off.

Well, that was easier than I could have imagined. I find my notebook, cross out No.1 on my list. Here we go – No. 2.

We set off along the causeway that skims the sea towards the main island. I settle back on my medical sunbed and try to enjoy the view. Peter has closed his eyes. Silently, I wish him sleep the whole way to Havana. Without his eyes on me I feel somewhat better but still guilty on many levels:

1. I could have returned the ice bucket to Belkis
2. Three people have travelled from Varadero and now must do that journey in reverse plus the extra time to the airport
3. Right now, there might be a Cuban in far worse plight than me who needs this team and this vehicle, a child, perhaps in a traffic accident.

Peter has every right to resent me. Medical equipment is scarce here as the ancient x-ray machine proved. At least I can rationalise the ice bucket as I haven't yet established the facilities on board. Thinking the word bedpan makes me want to pee. I send a message to my bladder: *Not yet. We can't wake Peter*.

Soon we are off the causeway, passing though Caibarién. I look with fondness at the giant concrete crab that sits on the roundabout into the town. I wonder if Dr DIY settled back to his house repairs? How is his wife managing their disabled son today?

We're on the A1, the main route through the island. And so we begin the reverse version of the journey we'd travelled over the last two weeks. It's a road with variable surfacing and an array of traffic that includes: Chinese-built tour buses, ancient cadillacs, pony and trap, tractors.

We pass through Ramedios, a colourful town believed to be among the first Spanish settlements, known for its Christmas festivals and its drag queen community since Mariela Castro, Raul Castro's daughter, campaigned for LGBT rights and gender assignment surgery through the health system. In Remedios only 6 days ago we'd celebrated David's birthday at breakfast. I'd bought him a Cuban cigar, also one of the balasa wood boxes bearing the cigar-smoking image of Ché.

At college I did not display a poster of that other iconic image of Ché, seen throughout the world on t-shirts and banners. I wore a CND badge on my duffle coat, listened to early Bob Dylan and shared his rage at the *Masters of War*, but stopped short of manning the barricades. At 18 I understood Ché was a hero who had been brutally murdered, allegedly with CIA backing, but my memories of the missile crisis of '62 – the terror my eleven-year-old self had felt alone in the girls toilets – still lingered around the idea of Cuba which seemed far away and somewhere to be wary of. Back then, I still felt an undertow of concern around this legendary figure. The child of deeply conservative parents, voting Labour in the general election had been transgressive enough.

If only I could have whispered to my teenage self: one day you will benefit from Ché's legacy; one day you will learn the significance of that image.

In my student days I didn't know that image of Ché had been taken in 1960. In March 1960, fearing another US invasion, Castro had ordered rifles and grenades from Belgium. A French ship, *Le Coubre*, delivering the consignment exploded in Havana harbour killing and injuring many. Castro believed it to be sabotage. As a trained doctor, Ché had administered to the injured and dying. It was at a memorial rally for the dead that the picture was taken by Alberto Korda. Castro addressed the crowds, flanked by Simone De Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, with Ché standing behind the group. For a moment, Ché stepped forward to survey the crowd and Korda, drawn to his pained expression, focused on him before he'd stepped back. But in newspaper reports the next day it was Korda's picture of Castro and the French visitors that made the front page.

Korda printed and cropped a version of his Ché image, creating a portrait. He kept a copy pinned to his studio wall. Following Ché's execution in 1967, a huge blow-up of the picture was displayed on a banner draped over the façade of the Ministry of the Interior, as a backdrop to Castro, announcing Ché's death.

A steel replica of the image remains in place.

Castro also agreed to an Italian publisher, which was issuing Ché's diary of his time in Bolivia, using Korda's photo on the cover. Posters of the image were printed to advertise the book. These posters proliferated throughout Europe at student demonstrations protesting Ché's murder. As Fidel had not recognised the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, no fee was received or even sought. Initially, Korda was happy to see the image used in support of the Cuban cause, but he drew the line when Smirnoff used it to advertise vodka. Korda proposed legal action and received a settlement of 50,000 US dollars, which he donated to the Cuban healthcare system. With copyright secured, might Ché, posthumously, have gone on funding healthcare?

When the road signs show we're approaching Santa Clara, I'm reminded of Ché's victory here that secured the Revolution's success in 1959[v]. I flick through photos on my phone, find one I took, less than a week ago, of a crowbar that derailed the train full of arms sent by USA, destined to reinforce Baptista's troops and so defeat Ché and the rebels.

Messages whispered along the railway line alerted the rebels to the train's approach, saying which train and its arrival time. A crowbar loosened the points; a tractor raised the railway line, ensuring derailment; an example of communal co-operation, intelligence and ingenuity – a great deal done with very little. Cuban characteristics that, so far, I have been lucky to benefit from. I take a photo of my legs on the trolley and text it to Jake, my son, and daughter, Izzy, *on our way.*

Was it the *whoosh* of the message being sent or the click of the camera function? Peter opens his eyes. Maybe he was only pretending to sleep.

'In your country, how much is?' he points to my iPhone. And shows me his not smart phone and tells me how much a month it costs. What can I tell him? I don't honestly know right now without having to look it up. And if I did, how would that translate into Cuban currency? He'd be appalled and, rightly, resent me even more. I fudge. When I don't give him a neat answer he shrugs, checks his bites and closes his eyes again.

We've been on the road over two hours when I clear my throat and whisper to Tamara:

'Bedpan?'

She looks puzzled.

'Bedpan – I need to pee …' I say and point, feeling useless.

A smile of understanding breaks out on her lovely face. She lifts the lid of one of the many compartments and produces a female urinal. From its wide, vulva-shaped throat I get the idea. She produces a blanket, covers me up and says I can use it lying down. I'm not convinced and neither is my bladder. I try. I really do try. I press the thing close, surely that's enough of a seal but, no. It's as if a steel gate has

come down inside, a muscle spasm blocks the flow. It's not happening. And now Peter is awake. I really don't want to pee on their trolley. The sensation of needing to pee, coupled with the refusal of my body to comply is distressing but I keep smiling and suggest it would work if I could be upright. I swivel my feet off the trolley.

'No, stop!' Tamara looks alarmed. She signals to Martez to pull over. Peter has to get out for the sake of my dignity. I stand with bottle in place and, after some deep breaths and much soothing encouragement from Tamara, fill the bottle.

'I'm sorry, so sorry' I keep saying, alternating with, 'Thank you, thank you.' Tamara smiles through it all and strokes my arm as she helps me back on the trolley. Peter returns to his seat and closes his eyes but not before, once again, he points to my phone and asks, 'In your country, how much?' Now, it's my turn to shrug.

We pass the signs to Playa Giron, or as we know it, Bay of Pigs, where there is a Museo de la Intervención, commemorating the event that turned the revolution from green to red, and led to Soviet backing, which, in turn, tightened the US blockade ensuring further reliance on the USSR. I look at Tamara with her Russian name and wonder which of her parents came here.

We stop for lunch, the crew led by Martez heads off to a roadside café, but we call him back to share our provisions. Even though I'm hungry there is plenty for all of us: ham and cheese sandwiches, oranges, bananas and more bottles of water than either David or I could drink. This pleases Peter.

Tamara, Peter and myself tuck into the packed lunch

Close to Havana the weather becomes overcast – grey sky, some rain. I notice an increasing number of Cubans hitchhiking, attempting to get into or out of the city. And here am I riding in like lady muck.

On arrival at José Martí airport, Martez makes his way to Terminal 3, weaving around a chaos of taxis and tour buses. The ambulance comes with a wheelchair. Inside the terminal, Martez wheels me to an information point. The crowds and the busyness are overwhelming. We wouldn't last long if left to our own devices.

Martez is arguing with a woman in uniform, airport staff. He is forceful. What emerges is this: the airport wheelchair service, secured by Juan at CEGA, claims to be unaware of my plight. The woman shrugs. It's never clear if she is denying all knowledge of the arrangement with CEGA or if they don't have a spare wheelchair. Martez will not budge. He stands with his arms folded.

'We stay until they bring chair,' Tamara is constantly reassuring.
David would like to wade in but doesn't have the Spanish. Should he call Juan at CEGA? Better leave it to Martez. Peter looks resentful at further delay. He scratches his bites in what I think of, ungenerously, as a theatrical manner. And so the five of us stand the only still group in a fast-moving throng.

Eventually, a wheelchair arrives along with a person to accompany us to the departure lounge. As we say our goodbyes, it is hard to show the deep gratitude we feel for their kindness. Yes, they were medical professionals doing a good job but they were so kind. Peter may have been grumpy about his bites but he stuck with us.

Muchas gracias, muchas gracias. We thank them endlessly. I rummage in my bag – we have no currency and would it offend to offer? I find a sort of bracelet that is meant to repel mosquitos. White plastic, like a watchstrap, supposedly impregnated with slow release repellent. Peter is intrigued.

'Please, take it.' He puts it on his wrist, and smiles. I have more and fish them from my bag. 'Here, taken them all.'

More rummaging through hand luggage reveals the ice bucket and toilet rolls. Tamara and Martez light on these, delighted to have them. We give them the remaining sandwiches, fruit and bottles of water from the packed lunch. Meagre gifts.

For the ten-hour flight I must keep my leg elevated if I am to avoid the kind of swelling that kept Tricia bedbound for 10 days before they could operate. CEGA has arranged an upgrade to the front row of business class. I'm wheeled to the VIP lounge.

The Air France crew are reassuring and attentive. At the door of the plane I say goodbye to my airport wheelchair and I'm transferred to a sort of stool-on-wheels that fits perfectly in the plane's aisle; none of the clinging to seat backs and hopping, as discussed with the CEGA nurse. Once in my seat, extra pillows and blankets form a tower on which to plonk my leg. It's a night flight. David sleeps most of the way. I doze and half watch films. And cabin staff regularly rebuild my tower when it slumps.

Wednesday 9 December

8am. Paris, Charles De Gaulle Airport. I'm still in a sleeveless dress, bare legs, as I hadn't found a chance to change into the warmer clothes I'd put in hand luggage. The switch to the earlier BA flight might get us back home at a more reasonable hour but it means having to do baggage reclaim from one flight and check-in to the London one. This requires a change of terminal and a wait on a mini bus assigned to wheelchair uses. Through the bus's open door, chilly air finds my bare limbs: 4C, apparently.

At Terminal 2A we are greeted by a member of ground staff who wheels me and guides us to the BA check-in. This young man exudes cheerfulness as he asks about my injury. Then, in perfect English with the most attractive French accent says: 'Do not think – *why me?* It is has happened. I was laid up for 6 months with my knee. Don't beat yourself up. There is no point. It will soon pass; you will be strong again. Relax.' Words I would hold onto over the next few months.

CEGA had booked three seats on the short flight to London so that I could sit with my leg raised. It doesn't go to plan. Soon two other people are demanding that I put my leg down, 'those are our seats.' The plane isn't full so, thankfully, it's sorted out and I can maintain the vital leg elevation.

Wheelchair and baggage reclaim at Heathrow pass without incident. Shortly after, 1pm we are met by Juliana, the driver of a private ambulance arranged by CEGA. She loads up not just me but our luggage. We live near the Whittington hospital where I'm headed but she sees that having large suitcases in A & E is no good for anyone. She swings by our house. David off-loads the luggage while I, helped by Juliana, change into the jog bottoms and sweatshirt. At the hospital, she warns:

'They're going to wonder why you are coming in on a trolley, so be ready with your explanation. Have your x-ray to hand.' And with that, the remarkable Juliana is off to rescue someone else.

I'm soon ushered into a cubicle where I offer the x-ray to a senior nurse.

'What's this; where did you get it?' She holds up this two-foot square piece of negative. A nurse trained, working in the days of electronic imaging, she calls others to come and witness this antique. But this antique was delivered to me within two hours of having fallen and no one asked me to produce a credit card before they'd let me near the x-ray machine; it secured a cast within three hours of the accident that prevented my ankle from swelling; it secured me a flight within 48 hours of the accident.

It's thanks to the 'antique' I'm first on the list for surgery in the morning.

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[i] ration shops provide basic foods at subsidized prices: rice, beans, sugar, milk
[ii] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/02/cuba.international
[iii] see Chapter 6, *We Are Cuba*, Helen Yaffe, Yale University Press, 2020