

Choosing kindness: Delvis's journey from Cuba to Huron County

They call her Miss Positivity.

It's a nickname Delvis wears with pride.

"I like to work with people. I like to help people. This is my strength, I think," says Delvis, a Cuban immigrant who moved to Canada three years ago.

Delvis is determined to spread kindness and joy with residents at a local retirement home as she pulls sheets off beds, sweeps floors and straightens out bathrooms.

"My manager says 'you are always smiling'. I told her, 'why not?' Why be sad, or why be angry, why?. There's not a reason for that, it's pointless, in my opinion. People that I come to help here, they need a friendly face," Delvis says.

The choice Delvis makes everyday, to look on the brighter side of life, is not because she's had an easy life.

In fact, Delvis learned about heartbreak and sacrifice earlier than most.

"My father died when I was eight and then my mother died too," Delvis shares.

As the oldest of four children, Delvis was thrust into a parental role.

"I started studying history in university, because I love history, I love museums. But in my second year, I quit. I needed to make a choice, get a job or finish university. Because I didn't have support to finish university, and my siblings were younger than me, I needed to work," Delvis reflects.

Delvis found a job with a tourism company in Cuba where she worked as a tour guide. She built a career leading visitors to 400-year-old castles, grand churches and vibrant city-squares. She also helped rent out a fleet of vehicles, including a collection of carefully restored 1950s classic cars which Cuba is famous for.

The classic cars, Delvis says, were a personal favourite. She too restored a 1953 Chevy.

"Oh my God, I loved my car. It was a very old car, it belonged to my family. I inherited it. It was one of the beauties of Cuba," she remembers.

As a tour guide, Delvis made a modest living. It was enough to provide for her two sons and to grow fruit and vegetables on a small piece of farmland outside the city.

"My farm was about 15 kilometres from the city centre in the mountains. I had plantains, mangoes, pineapples, oranges, bananas, avocados," she remembers.

After her boys had become young men, Delvis took a turn to become a traveller herself. She visited former customers who had become friends. She stayed with a friend in Canada, and helped that friend take care of her uncle who has autism, help that extended an entire year.

It was through that friend that Delvis happened to meet a man from Goderich. The pair quickly formed a bond and were married in 2023.

Delvis moved to Goderich and quickly started to adjust to life in small town Canada.

"It's a beautiful town and a very safe town. It's very quiet and I love the people," Delvis describes.

Delvis points out that the Saturday Farmers' Market is a weekly highlight, and that connecting with farmers is important to her.

Delvis quickly started making connections in her neighbourhood. She hosted learn-to-speak Spanish classes for people on her street. A small group of people joined, regularly practising and building friendships.

"They are also helping me with my English, a little bit at a time, and I am helping them learn Spanish," Delvis says.

Delvis has also helped organize street gatherings for Canada Day.

The value of those neighbourly connections is mutual. A neighbour nominated Delvis for an *I Am Huron* award, recognizing her contributions as improving the quality of life for others.

"Delvis demonstrates a contagious optimism and positive attitude of always doing her best," says Phil Maier, who nominated Delvis for the award. "In the neighbourhood, Delvis uses her horticultural knowledge to assist others in their gardens and offers landscaping ideas when asked."

Delvis and her husband have also supported youth locally, opening up their homes to host international students who are studying in local high schools for the school year. They've hosted young people from Spain and France, with another student scheduled to come this year.

"We try to help them to know the area better, to show them the culture of Goderich and of Canada, so they feel like they're home here," she remarks.

Delvis is grateful for the support from organizations in the community, particularly the library, a place she recommends other newcomers make their first stop when adjusting to life in Huron County.

Still, not everything was easy as she adjusted to life in Canada.

"When I became a permanent resident in Canada, it's like I had to start over," Delvis says. "I needed to get my credentials here in Canada. I needed Canadian certificates. I studied first aid, I did a course in safe food handling, and I'm taking an online program to learn English."

To find work, Delvis engaged the support of a local employment service, where employment counsellors helped her find work - first at a plant nursery, then at a landscaping company, and now with a local retirement home.

"I chose to be a housekeeper because it was the way that I could be in touch with elderly people and help them," Delvis says. "I like being there for them, to talk with them."

Delvis has also connected with other Cubans who are making Goderich their home. She and her husband make sure to take them to local sites, such as the Huron County Museum to learn about the area. She also advises those other newcomers to, "try to study the language" and, based on her own experience, shares that the organizations in Huron County can offer a lot of help.

True to her radiant personality, Delvis says Goderich is home.

"I love Canada not only because I married a Canadian. I have loved Canada for the past 20 years, when I started working in tourism in Cuba. For Cuban people, Canadian tourists are the first priority, our number one. We have this kind of connection with Canada. I love this country. I love everything here."

The I Am Huron awards celebrate the contributions immigrants and newcomers to Canada make in Huron County's communities. Nominations are received from the community, reviewed by a committee with lived experience of immigration, and awarded at a ceremony.

The project is funded with support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

For more about this campaign, visit: <https://www.huroncounty.ca/i-am-huron/>