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## Nilvia Calzadilla Núñez and her burial service

Nilvia Calzadilla Núñez, the 90 year old cultural institution of Cueto, Holguin in eastern Cuba, died late afternoon Saturday 4 June 2016. Her service and burial was 10AM the following morning. Cuba does not embalm or normally refrigerate bodies so burial is done quickly.

Ms. Calzadilla Núñez was a graduate of painting and sculpture at the Art School of Holguin as well as a college graduate in English and Fine Arts. She became a published author at age 16, was noted for the unique painting technique she developed, and her hand made dolls. Her works were included in a Cuban cultural exhibit that toured internationally.

She was born into a Spanish aristocratic family in 1926, an era when Cuba was very class conscious. Early in life, she shocked society by having a publicly open relationship with a Negro man. Never married, she had a number of significant relationships. She was noted for her independent socially liberal thinking which remained consistent through her life. People say society eventually came into sync with her, not the other way around.



Pictured in the middle with the red and white cane, she recited a several minute long poem without hesitation during the Culture Week presentations at the old folk's home in

December 2015. She apologized for her rusty English saying she had little opportunity to speak to Americans since the 1959 Triumph of the Revolution.



The news of her death spread quickly via “radio bamba”, or “radio lips” in English, the very effective Cuban word of mouth communication system. She had no living family and lived at the hogar de ancianos or old folk’s home. Many friends attended her service the next morning, a Sunday.





The local hearse is an old Toyota pickup truck with a cap on the back. It does have mechanical problems but only has to make the half mile trip from the funeral home out to the cemetery and back.



Wreaths were home made of paper and local flowers. This one was from her friends at the Catholic Church which she left following the Revolution. The non religious ceremony included a short eulogy read by a local official.





Cuban coffins are lightweight using only the bare minimum amount of wood to support the body. The top and sides of the coffin are a cloth covered wooden frame as they do not have to support the weight of any dirt on top and are intended to be temporary.



The crypt was sealed with reusable concrete slabs and mortar. After 2-3 years to allow for decomposition of the body and casket, her bones will be removed and placed in a small concrete container for permanent storage on a shelf. Then the crypt will be reused for another burial.



The entire funeral and burial ceremony took 30 minutes from departing the funeral home via bus to return.