When Presidents Barack Obama and Raul Castro made their recent historic announcement about reestablishing diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, people assumed that because I'm a Cuban exile whose family suffered under the Castro revolution, I would naturally be against the "thaw" in relations. That's not the case.

Given what we've been through, normalization of U.S.-Cuba relations is not easy for my family and me to accept. But it's time for a new approach to Cuba.

My parents, my younger sister and I were part of the early wave of Cuban refugees coming to America following the revolution. We arrived in Miami in February 1962 aboard one of the Pan-Am flights that brought thousands of Cuban exiles from Havana to the United Stated between the 1959 Castro takeover and the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. Like all Cubans fleeing the revolution, we had to leave everything behind.
We arrived in this country with the clothes we wore, five dollars and, believe it or not, two bottles of rum. My father promptly sold the rum to get a little extra cash. America welcomed us with open arms; we were given asylum, government assistance to get on our feet, access to education and, importantly, the opportunity to live in freedom.

Almost exactly 50 years after leaving Cuba, in 2012 I was invited to lead a group of alumni from Indiana University, where I currently serve as Dean of Education, on a people-to-people, cultural tour of the island. I was apprehensive, not knowing how I would be received by people brought up under a Communist government that called those leaving Cuba 50 years earlier "gusanos," meaning worms.

But to the person, Cubans made me feel welcome; people wanted to know about my life in America and how I felt coming back to my birthplace for the first time. They shared their fears and their desire to either leave Cuba themselves or see social and economic change.

The Americans in our alumni group were equally interested in the experience of the common people we met. Some went out of their way to establish friendships and stay in touch. All left with a better appreciation for the failings of the revolution, as well as those of U.S. policy toward Cuba.

For me, the visit underscored that even more than 50 years of hostility between the Castro revolutionary government and successive Democratic and Republican administrations in the U.S. have not broken the personal and cultural bonds Cubans and Americans share. These bonds run deep.

Starting when the Spanish traded the Florida territories to the British to regain control of Havana, and continuing through the Cuban Wars of Independence, the Spanish-American War, the founding of the tobacco industry in Tampa, Florida, the appearance of Afro-Cuban rhythms on the American music scene, the arrival of waves of Cuban exiles in the United States following the Castro revolution, the founding of Little Havana in Miami and more, the people and culture of the two countries have been inextricably intertwined.

Let's build a future based on these cultural bonds and the centuries-long warmth and affection that exist between the Cuban and American people. Renewed diplomatic relations will increase people-to-people contacts that will bring more political, social and economic changes on both sides of the Florida Straits than decades of frozen relations have done.

Much has changed in the world since the Cuban revolution, including the end of the Cold War, the opening of China, and the dawn of peaceful bilateral relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. Clearly, Cold War tactics have not worked in Cuba. Let's give the thaw a chance.

This post is part of a Huffington Post blog series called "90 Miles: Rethinking the Future of U.S.-Cuba Relations." The series puts the spotlight on the emerging relations between two long-standing Western Hemisphere foes and will feature pre-eminent thought leaders from the public and private sectors, academia, the NGO community, and prominent observers from both countries. Read all the other posts in the series here.
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