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Diana Nyad's last night in Havana, Cuba

**Diana Nyad's last night in Havana, Cuba, before the swim start
Friday August 30, 2013**

Reported by Candace Lyle Hogan



After a day so hectic it would take most of us mortals a week to recover from—up before dawn in Key West for a flight to Miami, then a flight to Cuba, a press conference, a last group meeting with her team of 35 (and this, after two previous days with mostly sleepless nights filling gaps in the team from those who couldn't make the sudden departure on a holiday weekend), finally Diana sat down for a quiet meal with close friends: Head Handler Bonnie Stoll, who will stay by her side from the escort boat Voyager for as much as 70 hours; Kathy Loretta, who has helped with arrangements in Cuba since 2010; and me, who's been on her every attempt to swim the 103 plus miles from Cuba to Florida—this will be the fifth—starting in 1978.)



Diana ate spaghetti with garlic and olive oil, just what she wanted, and drank some water. She appeared relatively calm, perhaps already mirroring the peacefulness of the waters promised by weather forecasters. She yawned.

"I'd like to get back to the room," she said, "pack a couple things, then if you gave me one of those short shoulder massages, just 15 minutes or so, I think I could fall asleep by 9."

Not too much to ask. Twelve hours from then she'd be jumping into Havana Bay, not to touch boat or dry land again for 3 days and 3 nights of swimming across the Florida Straits. "After these past few days," I said, "I can actually see how even this swim could be a relief."

Back in her room, she got into blue jammies, and placed on the bedstand next to her some water, an eye mask, and about a dozen New York Times crossword puzzles. "Look at the stack I brought," she said, "isn't that ridiculous—when it takes me 3 days to do just one!" She used to do them with my mother when she was alive. Now she does them with Bonnie. We've known each other 37 years; Bonnie has known her just about as long.

"I feel just a slight scratchiness at the back of my throat," Diana said, "and some other signs of the beginning of a cold, but I think if I get a really good sleep, I can beat it."

The light was still on when I left, with Bonnie yet to return to the room for her own much-needed sleep, but it was not 9 p.m. yet. "We're still doing it," Diana smiled. "Since 1978."

I will not have a chance to ask her whether that gift of sleep did come. The next time we see her she'll be being the greatest long distance swimmer who ever lived or ever will for one more one last time.

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P.S. Have you signed up for my 7 Day Reboot? Hop in! It's Free!

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