

Written by Ana E. Cruz-Backman, Harvard '90, in memory of Dr. Baltasar A. Cruz Vidal, PH.D., M.D.

On April 24, 2014, I was lying down with my children at bedtime, when my three-year-old son, Myles, told me that he wanted me to take him for a ride in a helicopter. I asked him where he wanted to go and he responded, "to pick up *Abuelo*", meaning Grandpa. The next day, I was so busy with work and household responsibilities that I didn't have a chance to call my father, Baltasar A. Cruz Vidal, (a/k/a "Papá" and "*Abuelo*") until just before bedtime. In a rush, as always, to get my children to bed, I took five minutes to call *Abuelo* and relate the conversation that I had with Myles the night before. My father was really happy. He said that meant that I spoke to my children about him and that they thought of and remembered him. He also told me to give Myles the scientific explanation as to why helicopters couldn't fly all the way from New York, where we lived at the time, to Puerto Rico, where *Abuelo* lived (too much fuel was required, which would make a helicopter too heavy, etc.), and he would instead need an airplane. Although my father and I had a lot we wanted to say to each other, I had to cut the conversation short and get the children to bed. My father called me later that night and left a long voice-mail while I was sleeping. I retrieved his message at 6 a.m. the next morning, but didn't call him back immediately because he had said he would be leaving the house early to attend a conference. I figured that I would call him back in the afternoon. A couple of hours later, I got a call from paramedics who were trying to resuscitate him after he had suffered a massive heart attack. My father never regained consciousness and passed away that day.

I miss my father terribly. I regret that I didn't have a long last conversation with him before he passed away, but I am extremely grateful that I had that five-minute conversation with him the night before he died. During my childhood, he was my Papá and my protector, my teacher and my mentor. During my adolescence and college years, he seemed to be my tormentor and my jailer, but as I grew older, he became my greatest supporter, my best friend and my children's only living grandparent, *Abuelo*. Our Harvard College reunions took place in the same year. When I was younger, we argued about whose events to attend, since my father automatically assumed that we would share our reunions. I wish he were still alive, so that we could share reunions again this coming summer.

My father was born and raised in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. He was a perfectionist. In his scientific mind, there was only one way to do things—the right way. He attempted to perfect his English by reading Webster's dictionary from cover to cover and expected his children to do the same in preparation for our SAT's. None of us did. He was raised by his father, Andrés Baltasar Cruz Ramírez, (a/k/a "*Don Baltasar*" to others and "*Abuelo*" to me) and a nanny, Tomasa Antequera Brasero. *Don Baltasar* was an old fashioned gentleman with a strong code of honor who always kept a copy of Emily Post's *Etiquette* on his coffee table. He taught my father to be the best that he could be at anything he chose to do, to treat people with respect, to help others, to be responsible and to pay his bills. My grandfather owned a rum distillery in Puerto Rico, "*Baltasar Cruz y Co.*", that went out of business during the Great Depression. After its debts were discharged in bankruptcy, he tracked down his creditors and paid them back every penny that had been discharged. Tomasa was a girl from the countryside who came to town to work in order to support her younger sisters after her father died. She started working for our family as a teenager, when my father was born. She was his nanny and she was my older brother's and my nanny as well. She couldn't read or write, but she was one of the wisest and kindest people I have ever

known. Unfortunately, my father didn't have much of a relationship with his mother, Antonia Vidal Peralta. I believe that is why family was so important to him as an adult. On Tomasa's deathbed, my father told Tomasa that she had been his true mother. These were the people who shaped my father and made him the great man that he was and who, in turn, formed me and my siblings.

I can say that the person who had the greatest influence on my life and the lives of my siblings was my father. After his college graduation, my father stayed at Harvard to pursue and complete his masters' and doctorate degrees in physics. There, he met my mother, Judith Mary Rosenblum, who was pursuing her masters' degree in education. Although my parents divorced many years later and my father remarried after my mother passed away, my father told me in recent years that to him, my mother always was and continued to be his true wife. My father was a loving and caring romantic who cherished family above everything else. He was a brilliant man, many would say a genius, who wanted to give back to society. He was a strong believer in community service. After teaching physics as a professor at the University of Puerto Rico for 9 years, my father went back to school and became an Ophthalmologist. As a physician, he never turned away a patient for lack of insurance or financial resources. He frequently made house-calls for patients who couldn't come to his office and drove patients home at the end of the day if they didn't have transportation. He had a "pay what you can" philosophy and never even sought to collect unpaid medical bills from his patients.

My father encouraged me and my siblings to work hard and have high aspirations. He also taught us to love and care for each other, to value and cherish children, friends and family and to help others who cannot always help themselves.

My father was passionate about learning. He had boundless curiosity about the world, was an avid reader and, as a result, often seemed like a walking encyclopedia. If anyone had a question about anything, the response was always to ask my father; he would know . . . Sure enough, he always had an explanation for everything. My father loved to travel, visit museums, and to read about and attend travelling art exhibitions. He loved to talk to his children. He also loved to laugh, dance, and tell jokes. He was charming and entertaining. He lived vicariously through each of his children and enjoyed hearing absolutely everything about even the smallest details of our lives.

My father was very successful in many ways; as a professional, as a father and as a human being. His ability to enjoy the financial aspects of his professional success, however, was limited by his choice to reside in Puerto Rico and own assets in Puerto Rico and by the Island's extremely dysfunctional court system. The liquidation of his assets, frozen during his divorce, has now been pending in family court for more than fifteen years and at the time of this writing, more than ten months after my father's death, the probate court has not yet facilitated appointment of the executor of his estate.

My father has been an inspiration to me and my four siblings; Baltasar David Cruz, Harvard '87, JD University of Pennsylvania '90, Andrés E. Cruz Iñigo, M.D., who graduated from Weill Cornell Medical College, recently completed a dermatology residency at the Mayo Clinic and just started his career in San Diego, Juan F. G. Cruz Iñigo, M.D., who just started an internal medicine residency and received a service award for extinguishing a fire in an elderly patient's hospital room, and Yousef J. B. Cruz Iñigo,

M.D., who is in his second year of an ophthalmology residency and is already working on his second publication in the field of retinopathy. My older brother, Baltasar, is a self-employed attorney in Dallas who routinely serves as a guardian *ad litem* for minor children who cannot represent themselves and represents other clients, including personal injury victims and impoverished clients, who could not otherwise afford legal representation, in other civil disputes. My younger brothers are all physicians who, like my father and older brother, are motivated by a desire to help others. I am currently a project finance and development attorney with Kiewit Corporation, a large construction company, based in Omaha, Nebraska, and the mother of three children; a six-year-old, Judith Linda Eleanor, and four-year-old twins, Myles Tomás Baltasar and Helena Josephine Charlotte. My father is survived by his five children, four grandchildren-- my 3 children and Juan Francisco's four year-old daughter, Ana Sofía.

My siblings and I would love to hear from my father's former classmates. Please share your memories of my father with us. He cherished his memories of Harvard and his classmates and looked forward to enjoying his class reunions.

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