

ALBERTO GONZÁLEZ, the Cuban humorist and iconoclast, resident of Miami, Florida since 1980, died in Westchester, Florida at the age of 84. He is survived by his 6 children, by 14 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren, his lifetime friends from Villa María, Cuba spanning 4 generations, and countless admirers of his biting political satire and comedy shows. He was known for his boundless generosity, idealism, and passionate dedication during his 60 year career as a writer and impresario.

His works were peppered with barbs, “double entendre” and news of the moment on politics, sex and culture with which he lampooned his rivals and foes with great force and courage, including writing openly against Fidel Castro in 1959 that cost him a year in prison during the Cuban communist revolution. In addition to hobnobbing with the best talent in show business in Cuba, Colombia, Puerto Rico and Miami, he was an inveterate agitator, as caustic as he was brilliant. His work spanning decades of passion and intelligence lives in all his radio and television scripts, his literary works and screenplays that supplied his audience with abundant laughter and entertainment in the same measure as social and political satire. According to him, his favorite writer and most important literary influence was the 20th Century Spanish humorist Enrique Jardiel Poncela.

Born in Guanabacoa, Cuba on September 17, 1928, his parents were Claudio González Sánchez, a Spanish immigrant from Galicia after the Battle of Gibraltar and Belen Gutiérrez, a beautiful Cuban born second generation Spanish immigrant. He was fortunate to study at the Colegio de Belen thanks to his father’s employer. His parents were working people who sacrificed a great deal to give him better opportunities, and he always wanted to do the same for his children. When he was 6 years old, an older woman came to visit his neighbors gave him a pen as a present; she foretold he would write for a living his works would be recognized for their creativity and originality.

He won his first writing contest with “TITO, EL POLLITO VALIENTE” sponsored by Cuba’s legendary radio station, CMQ, which later hired him to write the social critique of the day created by Antonio Castells, “Garrido y Piñeiro” with the hilarious duo of Alberto Garrido in black face and Federico Piñeiro as a Galician born immigrant which became known in Cuba as “the Aces of Laughter”; he also was a staff writer in the popular show created in 1942 by Zig-Zag magazine co-founder Cástor Vispo “La Tremenda Corte” with the beloved comic Leopoldo Fernández and Mimi Cal as “Nananina”. He also created and wrote “La Taberna de Pedro”, “Frente a La Calle”, etc.

Alberto wrote his first comic script titled “Madera de Comerciante” with Adolfo Otero and Mario Galí for TEATRO DEL PUEBLO in RCH- Cadena Azul in La Habana on September 1, 1949 at the age of 21. He had become well known as a humorist by 1952, and wrote his final shows in 2009 at the age of 81 thanks to the the US Government funding of Radio Marti. Yet, most of the written history of these creative shows omits giving him any credit for his penmanship, a fact he knew too well when he would tell us: “writers are not the ones in front of the audience.”

A tall man with dark hair with an intense gaze and the look of an intellectual behind his thick black glasses, he could passionately discuss history and politics defending his heartfelt and aren’t-they-obvious-to-you conclusions. Thanks to his comedy and political satire scripts, plays and endless productions, he accomplished six decades as a writer, bring his relatives to freedom from Cuba, and carry his ideological crusade against Castro everywhere he could.

Many traits of Cuban men and women make us utterly endearing to anyone: the warmth of our Caribbean smiles; our carefree swagger no matter what; the exuberance of our keen sense of humor coupled with tremendous bouts

of unabashed laughter; our abundant use of exaggerations in speech that turns hyperbole into a seeming understatement as well as storytelling into a national pastime; and, more: a surprising number of us can often be easy on the eyes. The Cuban combination of a silver tongue, panache and good looks has charmed the pants and skirts off a considerable slice of humanity for generations. There is little doubt in our mind that our father qualified as all the above.

His second wife, Consuelo Luque, was one of his most enduring fans, laughing with gusto at his humorous exploits in radio, television, newspapers and cinema and helped him manage the family and business for 25 years. But, not all was a fairy tale. As can be suspected, the superlatives that apply perfectly thanks to our good humored disposition apply very well in describing some of our colossal human failings. Alberto was not exempt by any means.

His was a fast paced, high stakes life, and he created ground breaking Spanish radio and television shows in Colombia, Puerto Rico as well as successful theater productions in Miami featuring actors imitating various personalities, politicians and, of course, Fidel Castro on stage. Plays such as "*A Vicente Le Llegó Un Pariente*" satirized the large displacement caused by the Mariel boatlift immigrants in Miami scene and allowed laughter to heal the rifts and to unite families at a much needed time. Yet, his own personal losses and sense of historical betrayal by Castro, whom he knew personally, his exile leaving parents, sister and daughter behind, the need for tireless efforts, and his amazing perseverance perhaps did not allow him to be a more tolerant, gentle or realistic figure. Idealism moved him and unleashed a runaway train of circumstance. Controversy became synonymous with his brand of passionate appeal, persuasion and satire; he made friends and enemies easily.

Three of his children were born in Cuba. He and his first wife Marina had Berta when he was 22 years old, and eight years later he and Consuelo, his second wife, had Claudio six months before the Cuban revolution and Justo, a year after that. His aspirations to be a politician and develop the platform of the Partido Creacionista Cubano were dashed, and the larger struggle that would become the majority of his adult life had just begun.

Thanks to Consuelo's British passport and relatives living in Jamaica, he emigrated successfully in 1961. From there, Colombia offered the best opportunity for him. In fact, unbeknown to him, the CMQ radio station owners had sold "La Taberna de Pedro" scripts to a Radio Caracol, and upon applying for a job, Alberto was greeted by the President of the station and offered a job on the spot. His scripts became the most popular comedy show: "El Café de Montecristo" and gave rise to the great Colombian humorist Guillermo Zuluaga, who has continued to delight audiences to this day as one of Colombia's greatest comics in Colombia.

No one can say with certainty what he felt during the separation with his parents, his only sister and her daughter, but photos and letters he wrote at this time suggest his grief. Alberto was very fortunate in that his silent struggles and pain were converted thanks to the alchemy of his humorist pen into the laughter of his audience and the relentless attacks of his valiant political satire. He also was fortunate that he was able to get his parents and sister out of Cuba and reunite in Colombia. After his third son, Oscar, was born in Bogotá, a large earthquake hit, and he moved the newly reunited family at once to Miami, where daughter Maribel was born and later became a young actress. Miami's Spanish media was still underdeveloped and in 1963; Alberto tried his craft in Puerto Rico. In spite of all the difficulties in his life, he enjoyed the good fortune of having all his family become residents of the United States and enjoy new opportunities and freedom. All his grandchildren and great grandchildren, that did not know him so well, owe him at least their US Citizenship by that fact. He also never forgot and was able to bring to Puerto Rico his oldest daughter Berta, who still keeps the letters he wrote to her in Cuba memorized.

After establishing himself as a political writer in the hit television show “Se Alquilan Habitaciones”, Consuelo helped him develop their first television production agency called Raditel. Over the years, they created several companies for artistic, cultural and philanthropic purposes such as an improvisational folkloric troubadour competition, a beauty pageant and weekend retreats for poor children at El Conquistador Resort. In 1968, their youngest son, Luis was born in San Juan.

We can recall those years best by the laughter of a live audience always in the background. Unabated laughter everywhere in Puerto Rico helped fan the spark of great colleagues, actors, producers and directors such as Paquito Cordero, Adalberto Rodríguez “Tiburcio Pérez, Alcalde de Machuchal”, Elín Ortíz “Reliquia”, Lolita “Pepa” Berrios, Ofelia Dacosta, Amparo Ribelles, Maribella García, Marilyn Pupo, Efraín Berríos “Pan Doblao”, Delia Esther Quiñones, Victor Arrillaga, Gilda Galán “Marunga” y “Doña Estelvina Tru-Tru”, Mario Pabón, and the fantastic comedian Rene Rubiella “Avelino Plumón”, who starred in the 1968 film “El Derecho de Comer” as “Findingo Lenguamuerta” with the popular singer Lissette Alvarez where Alberto found his first success as a screenwriter. The list goes on with actors like Vilma Carbia, Rolando Ochoa and Leopoldo Fernández, “Tres Patines” in the Puerto Rican reprisal of his show called “Los Problemas de Trespatines”; also, he gave rise to new talent like Fernando Hidalgo, Juan Manuel Lebrón, Pepe Yedra, and old guard comedians like Tito Hernández, and Luis Echegoyen as “Mamacusa Alambrito” and highest rating shows such as “La Taberna India”, his frequently censored political satire “Se Alquilan Habitaciones”---first of its kind in Puerto Rico—and plays like “El Pianista en el Tejado,” among others.

His eye for folkore and popular culture created rich moments like his prime time soap opera “La Colina de los Siete Vientos, his “La Reina de los Pueblos” beauty pageant, and a noon variety show featuring Great folkloric talents like Maso Rivera and his “cuatro” in improvisational competition of “décimas” Caribbean folk music that had not been deemed “commercial” enough by television executives. He also fought these executives who attempted to censure his political satire, and they found him lambasting their efforts and championing freedom of speech tirelessly. For a brief time, he re-opened and edited “El Imparcial” newspaper in San Juan, Puerto Rico. We moved around a lot in those days.

In the early 1980’s, they moved to Miami hoping to do film and created Moon Seventy Pictures. Instead, he found a better opportunity by producing a string of political satire theatrical performances featuring comedian Armando Roblán portraying an increasingly frustrated Fidel Castro: “No Hay Mal Que Dure Cien Años, Ni Pueblo Que Lo Resista”, “A Vicente Le Llegó Un Pariente”, “El Partido Se Partió” where he foretold that Raul Castro would take over after Castro, etc. These ran sold out shows for years, and some were presented in Tampa, Union City and Puerto Rico. He enlivened theater in Miami with great artists like Normita Suarez, Ramón Antonio Crusellas, Irene Farach, Mary Munnet, Luis Echegoyen, Tito Hernández, Manolo Coego and cultivated new talent like Luis Rivas Jr, Eddie Calderón, Gilberto Reyes, among others.

In 1982, when they opened the short-lived Spanish daily newspaper, “El Mundo”, the couple endured their last struggle together and separated afterward. The old adage “detrás de todo gran hombre, hay siempre una gran mujer” describes how much behind the scenes of success for a great man was the indispensable support of a great woman in his personal and in his public life. One can easily imagine how this man’s great powers of persuasion, passion and charisma also had a high personal cost by shielding him from so many other important aspects of family life and personal bonds.

Perhaps his works beyond that time never reached the same high point, but they still produced entertainment and diversion for countless, like the political satire radio show in Miami “La Mogolla”, that, surprisingly, some still

tried to censure even in the USA. He was an old hand at political speech writing and helped many local politicians who appreciated his chops. And, he also tried a business venture making luxury bus itineraries of US landmarks, parks and monuments called “La Habanera” Tours that provided hours of enjoyment for many retired couples and people like himself that were afraid of airplanes. The well-known entrepreneur Felipe Valls helped and supported him, and he loved hanging out at Versailles Restaurant.

Another great woman came into his life, Elida Castellón, and his last years as a writer found him a fitting and ideal place in Radio Marti, where the US Government production of his last controversial political satire show “La Republica de la Cigüetera” as well as other comical sketches were broadcast for the first time in 50 years back in Cuba. His writing went full circle even if he was never able to go back to his beloved homeland. Few writers become good humorists that tackle satire and culture indeed. We think of talents like Norman Lear when we consider the scope of the humorous and poignant characters that Alberto created and the controversies that ensued.

Alberto showed loved by being generous to a fault, by being critical of abuses of power, by fighting censure and political injustice, except for those who disagreed with his views. He was not the hand holding parent that most people may experience, but he was authentic and believed in his brand of goodness for all. He believed in dreaming big and ignoring defeat; he always worked every day of his life before Alzheimer robbed him of his sanity and acumen. It is easy to say that he had a rich and full life, but it will never be easy for anyone to imagine the hardship that he as well as men of his generation confronted in leaving the country they loved behind, in assuming the protective instincts toward their families in their exile and the survival instincts they needed to live day by day. It is regrettable that he would be kept so many times, beset with controversy and struggle, from being able to publish his scripts and literary works.

In many ways, he pioneered political satire in Spanish language TV and revolutionized theater & radio in Miami, and we still admire his special gift. Alberto was one of the most talented humorists of his kind. We have started a website memorial of his works: www.albertogonzalez-politicalsatirehumorist.com

All of his children can remember being touched by his goodness and recognize a spirit in him that could overcome adversity head on and never gave up. So many stories come to mind that show his courage, generosity and perseverance.

His fight with dementia was greatly helped by angels of the assisted living facility where he was cared for with love and dignity. All who genuinely love their service to the elderly and show their great humanity and care are no less than the hands of God blessing them until their time has come.

In memory of Alberto, find ways to make others laugh out loud; invite your extended family for Sunday brunch and spend the day; go to a play; and, of course, donate to any Theatrical or Alzheimer organizations of your choice.