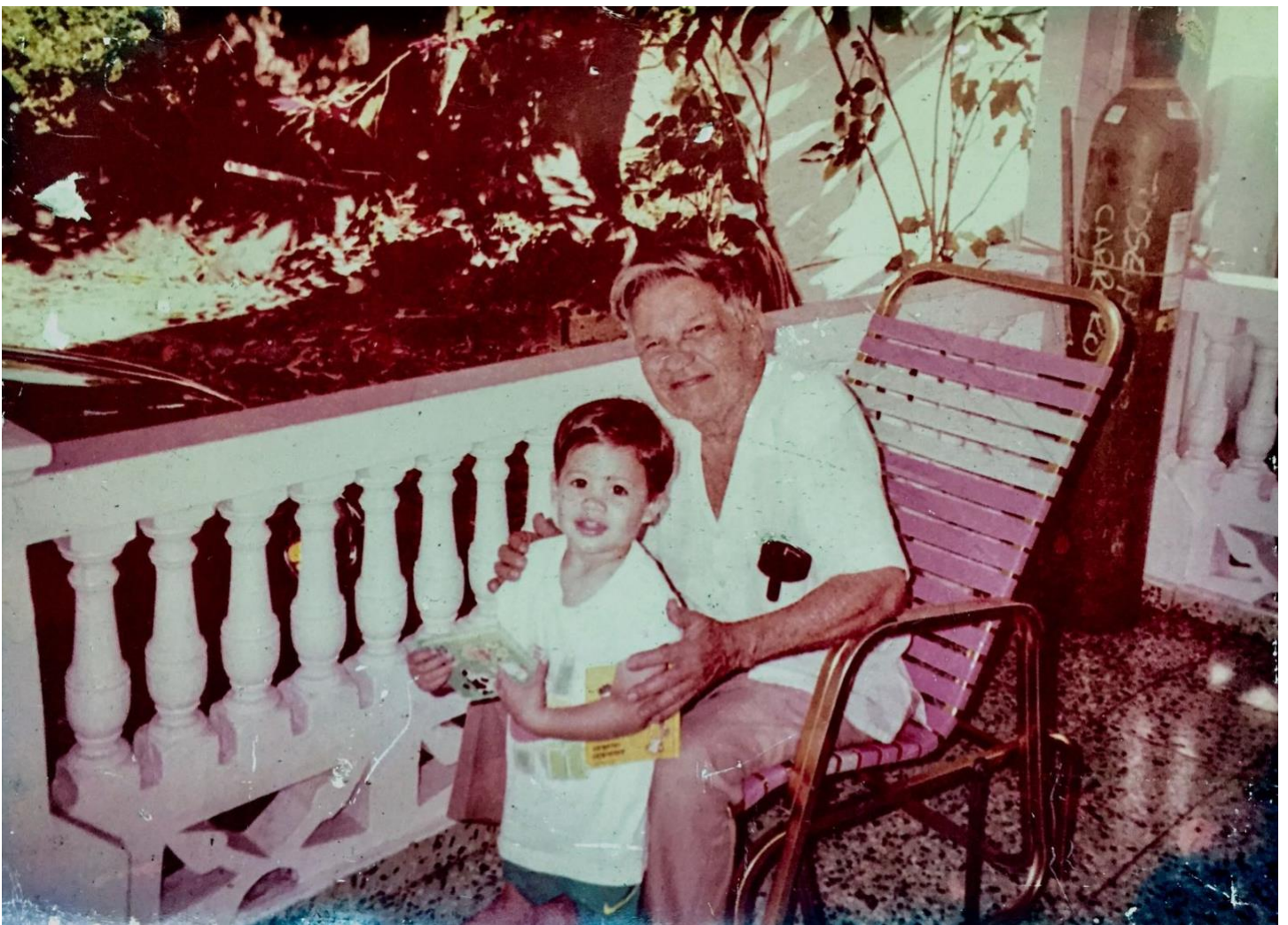


Uni World

Story



UniWorld Story by William Matos Jr

My grandfather, Jose “Chepe” Matos, was from Aguada, Puerto Rico. Although he had 52 grandchildren, the bond he and I shared was very special. While he had no formal education, he was full of wisdom. In my opinion, he might as well have had a doctorate. He could build and fix anything! He built homes and custom-made guitars. He fixed cars and repaired clocks and watches all over the island.

My grandfather loved the island and was terrified of flying, so the only two flights he took his whole life were to the mainland when I was married and when I built my first custom home. I remember him as he walked through our new home in awe. He was so proud. He humbly said to me, “Son one day come to Puerto Rico and build a little something. It does not have to be this nice”. I laughed, full of ignorance at twenty-eight-years-old. My reply was “Abuelo Pa Que” (“Grandpa Why? For what?”) “We have many properties being built here.”

His reply would change my life many years later. “Hijo, Todo el que se va de la isla, nunca traen mas de lo que se llevo.” (“Son, many people leave the island and never return with more than they took.”) I heard him but did not fully understand what he was saying at the time.

Many years later those words came back to me, as I landed in Aguadilla upon his death. I had zero strength or courage to attend his funeral, with hundreds of attendees as he was a good-hearted, well-loved man. That day, instead of attending the funeral, I found my way to the ocean deck of Cielo Mar Hotel (outdoor deck overlooking the ocean). At that moment it became my ground zero. The deck was overlooking what is now UniWorld Port property. At that moment, building UniWorld became my new life goal. I sat there for eight hours brainstorming and envisioning ways to bring something back to the island, just as my grandfather asked, in his honor, such as jobs, leadership, stateside Florida-style design workmanship, high line architecture, new ideas and training.

As I gazed over the water, I realized the truth of his words. As I looked back, I saw how my own father had left the island at sixteen-years-old, with limited education, in hopes of building a better life in the states. And he succeeded, retiring after thirty-nine years of leadership in pharmaceutical and manufacturing, but more so by being a true, God-fearing man. We grew up having a great life, but my father never returned to the island with more than he took, which was love, kindness and a will to win. However, my father groomed me into the man I am today.

So there I sat, overlooking the soon-to-be Port UniWorld. I knew I had to find the owner. When I arrived back to my office in Florida, I began a vision board for Port Uniworld Resort I saw in my head. I had hand drawn a layout for my designer on the flight back. I knew this was my purpose. A couple days later my designer handed me in total detail drawing of what I had envisioned with no needed modifications. Never has a drawing not needed a change in the development world. I got goose bumps and broke down in tears. Never has any construction design taken us less than three weeks to get dialed in with any designers and this was done in three days. I knew God's grace was all over this project. Amazingly, the corporate business attorney we hired in Puerto Rico the following year turned out to be the owner of the Port UniWorld property. He served as our attorney for the next nine years.

Years later at the height of my career, I attended a personal development training event with my friend, Robert Oblon, founder of World Ventures, a successful travel membership company at the time. There, in front of 800 people Robert shared a vision of World Ventures owning a fleet of planes for their members one day. On that day, with the same broad brush, I envisioned UniWorld having a fleet of cruise ships, floating hotels, marketing to the faith-based community, offering life changing events while stopping at Caribbean ports, helping the less fortunate (mission trips), creating jobs for the island, all while growing, learning and having fun!

Then the 2009 real estate collapse happened. We lost everything: friends, real estate portfolio, cars, credibility, stature and all rental income. I was humbled to a new level, but God used it to tear me down and so he could build me back up spiritually and mentally.

During this time of great financial turmoil and tribulation, my grandfather's words and the vision for UniWorld sustained me. I was determined to return to Puerto Rico and leave more than I took. I also wanted to be an example and inspiration for my children and peers to follow their dreams and heart, regardless of the obstacles. Many in my immediate family thought I'd gone crazy.

I arrived on the island with over twenty-nine years of experience remodeling custom high-end homes, and during the worst financial crisis, the island had ever seen, our development company managed to complete several major projects in Puerto Rico in the next four years. Our leadership was then tested again, when we were thrown the worst curve ball with Hurricane Maria in September of 2017, a category 4 being, only 2 mph shy of a being a category 5 storm, which made a direct hit on the island. I was on the island when the storm landed. It was unlike anything I have ever experienced.

The morning after Maria passed, I emerged to see utter destruction as far as the eye could see. There was no power, and no communication to States, but I witnessed firsthand the will and heart of this great island. The same heart, the same willingness to work, the same love and kindness that my dad possesses, the love that was taught by my grandfather. Although my grandfather had passed away, I felt he had also passed the torch to me, leaving me behind to fill his shoes. So, do we really lose our true heroes or are we groomed to fill the void they leave behind?

The island was soon filled with groups ready to work hard to get the island back up and running again. In our group, I had a chain saw, while others were swinging machetes. I remember looking around during a water break, and I was deeply touched by what I saw. I had never seen such unity and kindness for others. Days later, as I was sent to check on a friend of the family by my dad. I approached a very frail destroyed wooden home. "Billy!" I heard from the window. As they quickly came to the porch, "Come sit,

would you like some coffee?” They had no roof, no furniture, only a piece of sheet metal over the stove, so the sun would not bother the woman while she was cooking, and here offering to give what little they had. Many nights I went to sleep with tears in my eyes over the generosity that was extended during that desperate and trying time.

After Maria, my desire to give back to the island of Puerto Rico was in overdrive, not just to honor my grandfather, but also to honor all the loving, hard-working people, my people, who had endured and lost so much. Since that time, other major challenges, like Covid, have added additional challenges to Puerto-Rico and neighboring islands throughout the Caribbean, resulting in major job loss. The need is greater than ever, and with it my passion and determination to provide viable and effective food and green energy solutions to improve the economics and overall quality of life in the Caribbean, including the beautiful island of Puerto Rico.

In closing, my dear friend pro golfer “Chi Chi Rodriguez” told me once many years earlier.

**“The only thing in Life we take when
we leave, is what we leave in others”**

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