

Otto Ephrem Carballo

18th June 1945 – 16th April 2018

Otto was born in Trinidad the first child of Louis and Louise Carballo. He had three sisters and a brother and two half-brothers on his father's side.

It was in Trinidad, 50 years ago when he was only 23, when he was about to become a teacher that he met and fell in love with Christine who was then a teacher and a single parent. When they married the next year he became stepfather to Nicholas and Lalita who were then 7 and 5 years old - quite a commitment for a man in his early twenties. Their sister Lara - or Larry as she is always known - was born around two years later.

As a parent Otto demonstrated his commitment to education and learning and in developing a sense of responsibility. He could also be great fun.

The fact that Nicholas is now a property owner might be attributed to Otto. Nicholas had come home from Kuwait - where he had been teaching - having earned a decent sum of money that could easily have been frittered away, but Otto immediately suggested that he drive him around to look at flats for sale. Nicholas apparently wondered whether this was a ploy to avoid him coming back to live with them, but this is what helped put him on the road to responsible home ownership.

So now we have a tribute from Christine to her husband.

Christine's tribute to her husband

This is a day I never wanted to see and never even dared to try to imagine. Yet here it is. We, some of his family and friends, are saying goodbye to Otto, my beloved partner of 50 years, for 49 of which we were husband and wife. I very rarely called him Otto directly. My name for him, believe it or not, was Cherub. Somehow he always kept, even at - or perhaps especially at - the age of 72, something of the child; always open to new experiences and always strangely vulnerable.

As I went through the sad task of telling people that Otto had died, their reactions were of shock and genuine sorrow. Everyone spoke or wrote of his laughter, his love of food, his willingness to lend a helping hand. They said what fun he was to be around. He enjoyed having pleasant, friendly relationships with people and rarely

took offence at thoughtless remarks, usually preferring to give people the benefit of the doubt and forgiving them for what he called 'peoply things'.

Anyone who knew or met Otto became aware of his keen intelligence and his irrepressible sense of humour. These were certainly two of his qualities that struck me immediately and drew me to him fifty years ago. In fact for the first two weeks that we lived together his nightly occupation was entertaining me with his vast repertoire of jokes. I'm quite sure he'd find something to laugh at irreverently, even in the present sad situation. He never lost his sense of humour, and when his illness was very advanced he asked me 'Why do people laugh?' After I had tried to answer his question, he whispered, 'Make me laugh.' So I took a deep breath and then blew loudly into his naked stomach as one does to a baby. He didn't laugh. Then I said, 'And that is known as the blow job.' That made him chuckle.

With regard to his intelligence, or I would even say intellectual brilliance, Otto was always intensely interested in the work itself that he was involved in, rather than in the material rewards it might bring him. He genuinely was not interested in having the big house or the trappings of status. Being a big shot was just not a part of his agenda. In the many jobs that he had during his working life he never strove to be the boss, but instead taught himself the details of the work, and acquired new skills if he considered them necessary to improve his performance. He was always respected by his colleagues for his knowledge, his problem solving abilities and his willingness to impart his knowledge to others, which is a very rare quality.

For example when he was in the architectural world, he taught himself a system of designing buildings on the computer called CAD, when very few people were able to do it, thus becoming as marketable as possible in very challenging economic times. Later on, at the age of 47 when architectural opportunities dried up, he changed his career completely and became an immigration officer. He learnt several languages and became an expert in the detection of forgery. At his retirement celebration one of his younger colleagues said to me 'They don't make them like Otto any more' and I was very proud, knowing it to be true. But actually I think the real truth is that they never made them like Otto. He was a one off. And I was privileged to share his life.

Otto had many successes. He won a scholarship to Presentation College, one of the most prestigious secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, when he was a boy. He gained a Federation Chemicals scholarship to the University of the West Indies and subsequently a Government scholarship to study architecture in England. He became a member of Mensa, an organisation designed for people with exceptionally high IQ's. He always succeeded in getting jobs when all around him were saying that

it was impossible. But of all his achievements, Otto's greatest one was his total commitment to self-analysis improvement.

There were some aspects of his character, when he as a young man, that he was less than satisfied with. But from his early thirties he reflected on them, worked on them steadily until he became what he referred to as 'the person I always really thought I was in my head'. And what a wonderful person that was; funny, practical, helpful, thoughtful and so contented, particularly during the years in Brittany in France. He always maintained that verbal apologies and explanations were worthless. For him, feelings were always best demonstrated by action.

The last nearly nine years of Otto's life, of our life, were truly a gift. Living in the country, by the river in Boc Neuf in Brittany we found true peace and simplicity. Sometimes on our morning walks we would try to think of what we would do with a large sum of money if we were to win it, but we could never think of anything we wanted. We had it all. We often remarked how lucky we were to have each other and to be in relatively good health for our time of life. Little did we know what was waiting for us just around the corner.

Both of us wanted that life to continue for many, many more years. But it was not to be. It was snatched from us by the emergence, out of the blue, of an aggressive and inoperable tumour on, of all places, his brain. Even his illness was as extraordinary as he was exceptional. We were informed by Addenbrookes, possibly one of the most renowned cancer hospitals in the world, that there was no hope of even a slight temporary improvement let alone a cure. The tumour progressed relentlessly and killed him in about nine weeks after the diagnosis. Fortunately I was able to care for him at home as he loathed hospitals, and I feel that his final weeks were as comfortable as they could be.

But we, his wife and children, have decided to keep the house he loved and of which he was so proud in honour of his memory, as it represents the culmination of all his efforts and desires.

I should now like to read an extract from a poem by T. S. Eliot that we both loved and had discussed many times. It reflects Otto's willingness to view life as a journey to be explored. He never flinched from new experiences. He was prepared to enter into a serious relationship with me, a woman from a different race and a different culture - with two small children to boot - in the face of a fair amount opposition. He fearlessly changed countries, moving from Trinidad to the UK and finally to France. He always embraced the challenges presented by change. No one knows for sure

what happens after death. But if there is some form of individual consciousness that continues when the body is no longer needed, then I am sure that Otto will be busy finding out what opportunities exist for him in his new environment.

.....We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate,
When the last of earth left to discover is that which was the beginning.
At the source of the longest river, the voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple tree, not known, because not looked for
But heard, half heard, in the stillness between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here now, always
A condition of complete simplicity costing not less than everything.
And all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well,
When the tongues of flame are infolded into the crowned knot of fire,
And the fire and the rose are one.

(from Little Gidding V, the Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot)

Larry's memories of her father

My dad was an amazingly brave man, who enjoyed learning things, and was a willing teacher. I enjoyed these times with dad on the long journey home as, in a time before Google, I had someone to answer all of my questions about how things worked. He was very patient with the "how" and "why" questions - probably knowing that I had inherited his need to know things and how things work so it was all his fault.

Even if dad was late picking me up from school because of traffic, I never for once thought that he would not turn up. He always did. We would then embark on our journey home taking the short cuts that extended our journey home and, with it, also extended our time together. He would allow me to change the gears as he drove sometimes.

In addition to answering all my questions, we would listen to songs. We would giggle at songs like "A boy named Sue"; Dad also had a good line in jokes, limericks and impressions! We would often stop off on the side of the road for snacks, like roasted

corn, fresh coconuts or cakes. Sometimes he would stop off for oysters which I declined, but I was always happy to receive a slightly questionable burger and cola in their place.

My memories of these stop-offs, tend to merge with the memory of his recitations. He knew all the words to the Walrus and the Carpenter and would always deliver this upon my request. He always liked the part where the walrus and the carpenter decide that it is the time to feed, and the oysters cry "but not on us!" I can hear his voice and laugh with painful clarity within that particular line. My partner and I hope to do the extract justice to try to do him proud today - a day that as a child of a parent I knew would come, but never expected it to happen in the manner that it did.

Another memory that I have had passed back to me through the family mythology, is when, at age 5, I asked my dad how the TV worked. He explained the workings of the cathode ray tubes etc. while I was still trying to imagine how they fitted the little people into the device. He explained it all very carefully and precisely and then asked me why I wanted to know. I replied that I had wanted to watch Kojak. Dad liked that memory.

On the topic of television and memories, I know that one of the things that my partner Tracy always loved and valued was the way that they would both quietly sit watching documentaries about things like volcanoes. They would quietly be taking the information in while mum and I nattered in the background.

In short, Dad was a shy hero. He knew everything that there was to know, and he was always there in a quiet but certain way. I remember his words of comfort whenever I was nervous about embarking on a new venture. He would always say to me that, "if anyone can, you can"....so with that in mind, upon asking him how I might cope with his funeral, I am pretty sure that that is the answer that I would receive.