

## Joan Menocal

*Reflections given at the memorial service for Alberto Menocal, at the church of St. Martin in the fields, December 13, 2005*

Many of you knew Alberto to be warm, charming, intelligent and handsome. So did I, but I probably know some things about him that you don't and I'd like to share some reflections about a few particular aspects of this complicated and wonderful man.

As a father, Alberto was not easy on our kids but he loved Carmen and Alex fiercely. He wanted to make sure they could choose fulfilling careers and made their education a top priority. Recently we were driving along the winding part of Lincoln Drive and he said, "I'm so glad Alex is happy in his job. I never was really happy in my job." He really wanted our kids to have better careers than he had. For that reason, he never encouraged Alex to be an artist. He knew how difficult it would be to make a life that way. He was so proud of both Alex and Carmen. She his daughter, the architect. Not just for bragging rights but because he knew she loved her work and had a solid start in life. Alberto sometimes doubted his influence on our kids. He was genuinely surprised when I pointed out traits that they "inherited" from him; Carmen always keeping cash neatly sorted in her wallet with ones in front, Alex' intolerance for bad table manners.

Alberto was extremely loyal to me and our children. He would never stand for any of us to be treated badly. His loyalty even extended to our cats. About a year ago we took in Carmen's large black cat, Miles, for an extended stay. Lola, our more neurotic cat was so intimidated by Miles that she took to the basement for the duration. Alberto expressed concern for Lola and told Miles that after this visit his visa to Mt Airy would be revoked.

"While he may never have defined himself as such, Alberto was an artist," as Carmen noted in the obituary she wrote for the Chestnut Hill Local. What I've come to realize is that Alberto's artistry wasn't a stand-alone quality. It was always combined with love, hospitality or generosity.

Alberto expressed both his love and his artistic talents in his jewelry making. Sometimes he expressed regret that he wasn't more of an entrepreneur but what he enjoyed about making jewelry was creating jewelry for the women in his life; me and Carmen. It didn't matter to him that I already had drawers full of the necklaces and earrings he had made; he was always eager to give me more. He had an unconventional flair for color and combinations. I didn't always agree with his choices; he'd ask me to choose a combination of beads, for instance, and then proceed to pick out a more beautiful array. "You really like that? I think this is much better."

Here's a story related to love and jewelry. Soon after Alberto proposed to me, he went on a long-planned trip to Europe. (I know that seems strange; nowadays guys have bachelor parties before the wedding) Anyhow, he wrote me very sweet letters and in Rome he bought me a beautiful coral necklace and earrings. Last spring, 34 years later, we traveled to Italy together for the first time. In Sorrento we visited a coral jewelry manufacturer and he insisted on buying me an outlandishly expensive gift of a coral ring and earrings.

Alberto practiced extravagant hospitality which reflected both his artistry and his regard for our guests. He was my partner and inspiration whenever we entertained. One of our most ambitious events was his 60th birthday party, which some of you might remember. He envisioned it and created a fantasy in our backyard on Springfield Avenue—all I did was cook. He constructed about a dozen tables and covered them all with colorful tablecloths from our collection. We rented plates and chairs. A large canopy, made by Alberto, was placed over the food. Our

garden was strung with Chinese lanterns; candles and torches made it glitter. About 75 people came and it was wonderful fun. Over the years we gave many dinner parties, including several that were auctioned off at the St Nicholas Fair at St Martins. Alberto was always in charge of setting the table, a task he did not take lightly. He always took the trouble to make it beautiful and special; he made the table settings unnecessarily elaborate; nothing was too much trouble for our guests.

Alberto had a very generous heart. I used to get annoyed when he promised money to all the charity telephone solicitors, but he wanted to give. He was also willing to share his wonderful and comprehensive photo albums with his cousins and siblings. Once we took the family albums to Miami, rented an overhead projector and had a family gathering to look at the pages. It wasn't all that easy to remove the pages from the albums, rent and haul the cumbersome projector and then replace the pages in their proper books. Everyone was so enthralled by his artistic rendering of the family history that he made multiple photocopies of about 150 pages for everybody that was interested. Recently, one of Alberto's cousins asked him to make a photographic family history so Alberto created an abbreviated family photo album with explanatory captions. He did a beautiful job, presenting the album to his cousin Alvaro in October when we made our last trip to Miami. When we got home, Alberto felt inspired to make similar albums for Carmen and Alex. He also wanted to reach out to his sister, Fichu in Cuba, and was making a photo album for her, too. He was in the middle of that project—it was spread all over the dining room table—when his life as he knew it was cut short.

I am filled with gratitude for my 34 years with Alberto and my heart is filled with good memories. I thank God for the gift of Alberto in my life and pray that the love we shared so deeply will continue in some form or another.