

## Thank you, Muso!

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The radio spectrum, cyberspace, and newspapers are full of much deserved tributes to Dr. Manuel Ayau, known affectionately as Muso. Our teacher and mentor rested in peace on August 4, 2010, having put up a fight against an unrelenting cancer with the same optimism and spunk he invested in his fight for liberty. The memories and anecdotes we now share show that his example meant as much to us as his practical teachings.

Muso founded Universidad Francisco Marroquín in 1971; thirty years later this university awarded an honorary doctorate to the 1986 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics, Dr. James Buchanan. In my introduction to his lecture, I admitted Dr. Buchanan was my hero. My choice of words concerned Muso. He pointed out that “my hero” did not understand one of his favorite topics, the Law of Comparative Advantage, a serious fault in any economist. He proved it, handing me an article penned by Buchanan.

This incident taught me many things. I learned that we must examine ideas critically without compromising our appreciation for the other. Muso did not dismiss Buchanan’s real contributions. “Nobody is perfect,” he would repeat, recognizing his own and other people’s faults. I learned it is sheer laziness to surrender one’s judgment. Muso cultivated his talents until he was able to sustain elevated discussions with the best minds; without vanity or self-doubt, he illuminated world-renowned scholars, pointing out logical errors and new insights. I also learned that we must exercise prudence in our speech and in our actions, not to avoid embarrassing slips like that of Buchanan, but to be faithful to the truth and to merit the trust of others. I learned the value of self-correction. “When I err, I rectify. And you?” Muso would say, laughing in admission of the effort this sometimes required.

Yet the quest for truth was much more than a pleasant game for Dr. Ayau. He submitted himself to rigorous intellectual training because he *needed* to understand how to improve the living standards for Guatemalans. Later, he *needed* to convey his learning to all those who would listen, understanding that this was the only way we would mitigate the burden of poverty and its ugly consequences. Even his enemies recognize that this enterprise was inherently noble and well intended.

He became an educator because he was coherent. He lived the Golden Rule he preached. “One cannot respect a person unless one respects his freedom.” Persuasion is the only means to engage free and rational beings. I learned from Muso never to lose faith in our fellow travelers and in the journey itself. He never stopped perfecting his lesson, although he faced our constant forgetfulness and incomprehension; he looked for new phrases and jokes to transmit his message time and time again. Sympathy undergirded his delivery. Along the way, Muso was able to rise above differences, and forge and retain sincere friendships. One of his most lovely and inspiring friendships is the one he shared with his wife Olguita. His long and stable marriage is an encouraging beacon for future generations.

Years before I read Buchanan, I already had a superhero, one who never fell from his pedestal. I think Muso knew it. . .