

# Florida's Most Inspirational Chef?

## EL CHEF EFRAIN



## LUIS ANGEL VELEZ



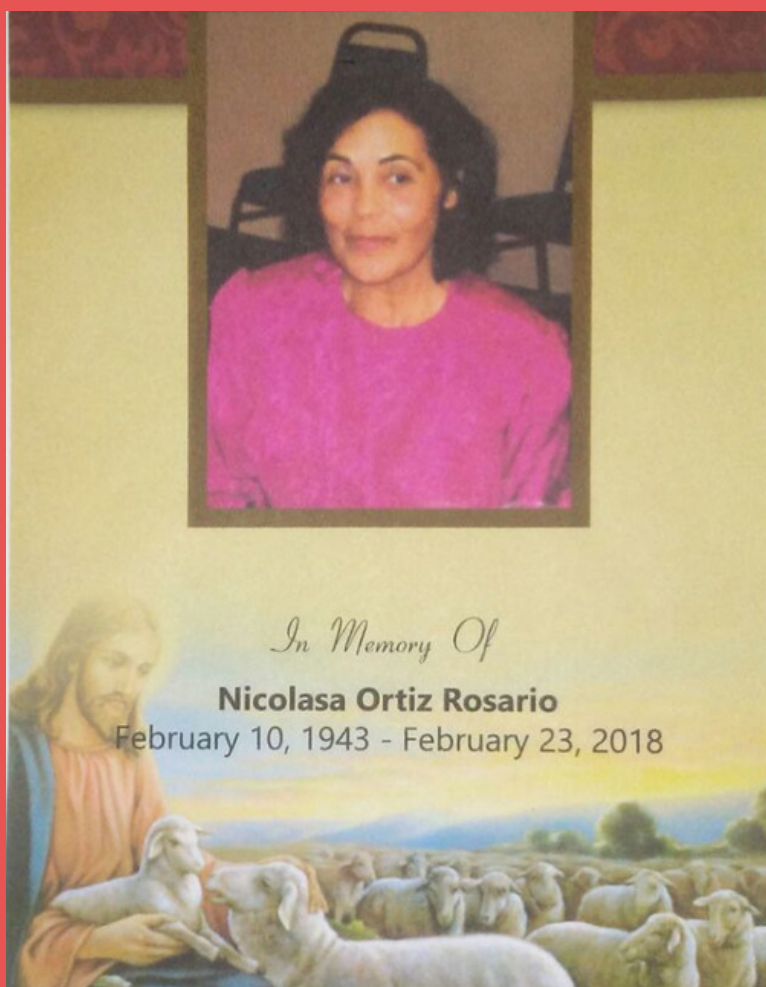
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BY

LUIS ANGEL VELEZ





## FOREWORD

You are not alone in this world, if times get hard and you think about quitting. I don't think that there's anyone in the world that has not considered giving up on dreams, jobs or anything that was important to them when things got tough. We all go through our share of problems and look for inspiration from spiritual sources and even each other.

There's a story that most people have heard of called Pandora's Box. It seems to really make a lot of sense. When you think about all of your troubles and you just wish that you could just trade them with someone else's problems. Then you get the opportunity to see and feel what others are going through and then you beg for your problems back.

I would not want to trade places with my cousin Efrain. The amount of pain that he is in on a daily basis, is hard to even imagine. He was on top of the world when he came to Florida, back around 1983. He was a successful entrepreneur who's first problems came from family.

Even before I knew how successful he was, I always admired him. He never depended on anyone and never made excuses about anything that happened in his life. Have you ever known or do you know anyone like that? Someone that just by knowing them, gives you the energy to push forward? This book is an effort to give him some inspiration and to help him to get his life back on track.

I'm going to do my best to take you through this man's life in a short e-book, which is something I have wanted to do for many years now. For so many years, I told him that he should write a book about some of his experiences, but he has not. I feel that it would be a shame if people did not have the chance to at least know him even partially, the way that I know him.

Enjoy the book and please share it with anyone that you know who could use a little lift in their spirits.

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## INTRODUCTION

First, I want to thank El Chef Efrain for allowing me to write this book for him and also thank everyone that I interviewed to get information for this book.

This true life story is about a man who is the most inspiring person that I have known in my life. Many know him as El Chef Efrain, throughout Orlando, Central Florida, Miami and other areas in Florida. His full name is Efrain Ortiz-Benitez Jr.

His determination and spirit are like no one that I have ever met. This is the main reason that I have always wanted to write this book for him. For some crazy reason, I thought this book would take a few hours to write. Was I ever wrong! A lot of research and edits went into this book. I really hope you like it and can share it with anyone that you think that it might help

Why is he so inspiring? Several reasons. He was always a huge man, weighing around 500-600 pounds, but I think the largest part of him is his big heart. After he turned around 20 years old, he struggled just to walk. By looking at him, you would never think that he was able to run circles around most people in the kitchen.

He had his share of problems, like everyone else, but one night his life was changed forever. After a car accident on November 7, 1997 that literally ripped his leg off and crushed the other one, he was told that he would never walk again. Recuperation took a long time after extensive therapy inside his home and also where the Orlando Magics do their therapy; the Florida Hospital Sports and Rehab Center. He always amazed his doctors.

After this, back in around 2009, he received weight loss surgery because he needed to do something to lose weight and take some of the pressure off when he walked. I remember going to one of his doctors with him (Dr. Tamayo, had nothing to do with the surgery) and seeing the scale for the first time. It said 466 pounds!

If there was anyone that needed this weight reduction surgery, it was him. He had to undergo a series of tests before he was approved for it. Psychological and physical tests that he ended up passing. You must sign certain waivers limiting liability, because it is a dangerous procedure.

He underwent the procedure but something went wrong. There was internal bleeding that has caused him even more pain than the car accident. At times, it feels like he is being cut on his insides.

The amount of pain that he tolerates on a daily basis is just unimaginable, but he refuses to use the stronger and more addictive pain medicines.

Anyone else that I know, would be laying somewhere in a bed. This is what some doctors tell him to do. Just take it easy and keep the weight off of his legs. He constantly is pushing himself to the limit and refuses to stay down. Reminds me of the scene from the great movie 'Cool Hand Luke', where the star takes a bad beating but refuses to stay down.

This world can be filled with so many twists and turns that you have to be very strong in all ways just to survive. Keep pushing and see things have a way of working themselves out.



My name is Luis Velez and this story is about my first cousin, Efrain Ortiz-Benitez Jr., otherwise known as El Chef Efrain.

I've been wanting to write a story about his life for at least 15 years. Out of all of my cousins, he had become my favorite, the more that I got to know him and about him as we got older. I never spent much time with him when we were younger, but as the years passed, we grew closer.

After many conversations, he finally answered some questions for me. I really wanted some pictures that were taken many years ago, with many famous musical artists. Almost all of his pictures were misplaced over the years, but I was able to locate some newspaper archives that showed many of the events that he catered and also coordinated.

Many of these artists are still alive and can confirm that they knew and some still know the chef well. He was and is unforgettable except that he is not as big today, after losing a lot of weight.

Some memories that I have with him are when I would drive him around in the late 80's up to 1991 in Orlando and Altamonte Springs, it seemed that everywhere that we went, he knew someone. Even at traffic lights, he would be talking to people in the next car or yell out the window to someone walking on the sidewalk that got happy when they heard it was him.

Many people would come over and hug him and then I would be stuck for a while waiting for him. I did not know any of them. I had always been more of the introvert and did not ever keep more than a handful of friends, so when I saw this, it was really amazing to me. This guy really got around and knew a lot of people! I'd never seen someone that was so popular.

What stands out to me about this man the most, is that he never gives up. I have no clue how he gets up and pushes himself every day. He should have been dead many times over. Even with all of this going on, he almost always has a smile and is quick to help others when he can. He loves to make people laugh and make them feel good through his cooking.



**Seafood, Puerto Rican and Italian cuisines are his specialties, but he can cook many different types of cuisine, even vegan! There are many other great chefs that really know their stuff, but he stands out due to not only his physical problems that he has had, but also the way that he truly cares about people and cooks with passion. He is constantly pushing himself to the limit. He really has no choice.**

One of the current radio personalities in Orlando, named LucyMar Rivera, has known him for years and they even attended some charity events together. They drove to St. Jude in Georgia more than once to visit the sick children and give donations that they had raised from several events that even famous bands played for free.

When we go to Victorio's Oyster Bar and Grill in Oviedo, owned by his friend Victor, Efrain wins stuffed animals from a machine and gives them to children with cancer. I had never known that he believed in the same cause as me. I've never won in that game. He won like 3 of them in 5 tries!

Originally, this e-book was put out for sale last year (2017) and the intention was to sell it and give most of the profits to him and St. Jude's for children with cancer. Being brutally honest, I didn't sell even one copy, after marketing it only to some friends on social media. I just made some edits and am just giving it away. There are laws that I now believe in, which state basically, that when you do good things for others and give freely, the universe, God or some forces we can never really understand, helps you also.

This might be why he always seems to be ok. This short book will inspire not only Puerto Ricans, but really anyone that has had struggles that just needs a little hope.





## LEGAL DISCLAIMER

As a legal disclaimer, the times and events are to the best of his memory and mine as well, as we go back over 40 years at times. I have investigated to the best of my ability, to bring you accurate information. I mention several famous people in here that he knew, cooked for and even hired for some of the events listed.

Since I do not know who is still alive or who is not, and to avoid any possible frivolous lawsuits by family members or anyone else, these performers are only going to be listed in this book as performers for the events listed and not that they were hired by Efrain. Any possible errors are not intentional nor meant to mislead anyone.

This e-book is free, and the option to pay anything has been removed from the website. I'd really love to help him get back into the kitchen and working his magic. I had seen him in action not too long ago, while helping some friends out for free, and he was amazing.

I'm hoping that this e-book is successful in helping others and helping him also. If it helps helps you to appreciate your life more and motivated, then my job is done. All that I ask is that you give me some good feedback and share it with your friends and family. I'd love to write some more books in the near future.

In order for this to be successful, I will need your help and I want to thank you in advance. It took more time and work than I expected but it was worth it.

Lastly, the chef has had problems walking for many years and can not stand up for long periods of time. In many restaurants and some of the events, he was helping as a consultant, at times even helping to cook from a sitting position. Circumstances have never stopped him. When you eat his food and are happy, it gives him a great joy that pushes him forward.

No part of this book can be reproduced or altered without the written consent of the author or the real El Chef Efrain that is described in this book.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Learning How to Cook From Grandma



I have known Efrain almost all of my life, since I was about 7 years old. It is so hard to start, because there is so much to tell about this man. He was born in Puerto Rico on July 27th of 1963, and was there until he was about ten years old.

He has many memories from there and still misses Puerto Rico, as it is a beautiful island with some amazing people there. His parents brought him to Edgewood, Maryland, which is where I lived.

Before he left Puerto Rico, he used to watch his grandmother Fani when she cooked. She would make all of the traditional Puerto Rican foods. He was very young, but he already learned how to cook many different Puerto Rican dishes. From mondongo, rice and beans, yuca, verduras, pernil, pollo, tostones, bacalao and so many other traditional foods.

His sweet grandmother was some cook and was very well known for her cooking in the small town of Caguas. She had owned 3 restaurants. Two of them were called 'Los Caporales' and 'Los Caporales 2' which was off 'La salida de Cayey'. The third one was in Bayamon and it was called 'Mofongo el Pilon en Bayamon'. He used to go in the kitchens of the first two and his protective grandmother warned the cooks that nothing better happen to her grandson.

His other grandmother and grandfather on his father's side, taught him how to cook by him watching them also. Many of our family members were from Caguas. I especially remember my mother talking about 'Caguas Norte'.



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## CHAPTER THREE

### Childhood Memories

When younger, I do not remember him too much. Yes, I saw him a few times when he visited, but the memories are just a few. I was actually closer to his brother Noel, as we used to play and hang out more. During those several years, I did not have much contact with him at all. His father was my mom's brother, and my uncle came around pretty often as I remember.

There are two things that stand out in my memories of my cousin Efrain, when younger. One, has to do with feet and a restaurant, that I will go into in a little while. The other one was a wrestling match that we had in my house. I remember him almost suffocating me on the couch. It took all my strength to get him off. He was always a large individual and I was rather small but luckily strong enough. I think he was trying to toughen me up a little, I really do not remember. I'm not saying that he tried to kill me! But, now that I think back, maybe he was... Nahhhh, I am just kidding. It would be nice sometimes to be a kid again. Such few worries as compared to when you are grown up.

His nickname was 'Papote', which I still call him 'Papo' for short, to this day. To me, it always stood for a big person or super size. In this book, I will be calling him 'Efrain', 'my cousin' or 'El Chef Efrain'.

In my eyes, I always thought that he was older than he was, because he was always working and looked like a man to me when he was only a teenager.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Job at 13 years old ???

Efrain was young but determined to start working and making money. Everyday, he would walk home from school and pass by this restaurant called Phillips Pizza. He would go inside any chance that he got and knew that he wanted to work there. Perhaps it was his large physique that got him the opportunity to be given the chance to even work at such a young age, but look at what happened next.

He asked many times if they needed some help, but was told no because he was so young. One day Efrain brought his mother to the restaurant after telling her many times that he wanted a job and to learn about business.

His mother Nicolasa, is a very spiritual person that reads the Bible every day and is still alive at the time of this writing. She went to the pizzeria with Efrain and spoke to Sammi, because her son was very hard headed and really determined to get his way. She gave him permission to start working and learning the restaurant business at the age of 13, just a few months before he turned 14. I'll never know how he was able to convince them that he was ready for this job.



He swore to her that he would keep doing well in school, so she agreed and convinced his father also. My uncle didn't like the idea but went along with what she said. My uncle told him that he better not do bad in school or he would not be working there anymore. The other rule was that he could not work on Friday night until sundown Saturday. No, they were not Jewish but Seventh Day Adventists, which has similar rules that they followed.

At the young age of 13, he was ready to start working in a restaurant. No, not a Puerto Rican cuchifrito or that type of restaurant, but an Italian restaurant.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### Efrain Gets the Job.



It does seem a little little bit crazy but I'm not going to try to get into the heads of the restaurant owners and why they let him work at such a young age. The owner's name was Philip but he leased the place to Santo 'Sammi' Lurito and Giacomo Deluca. They ended up buying the restaurant.

Phillip was the one that approved and hired Efrain after receiving permission from my aunt to allow him to work there. Phillip must have got tired of seeing him go inside his restaurant every day and asking for work. This also made him respect the young boy. Efrain was young but determined to start working, making money, helping his family and becoming a successful businessman.

At such a young age he was already demonstrating that he was willing to put in whatever effort was necessary and this really impressed the Italian men, which really paid off for him in the next few years.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Time to Prove How Bad You Want It.



After school, he went to the pizzeria every day. Did I mention that he had to prove himself? A toothbrush and tile. That was his test. They paid him \$75.00 a week and made him clean the tile floors with a toothbrush every day. Extreme? Perhaps, but it seems like it was an effective method. Imagine trying to do that with kids nowadays. Good luck trying to get them off of the i-pads or the tv!

Was Efrain happy to clean the floors? Not really, but he was glad that he had a job and was willing to do whatever it took. Being a floor cleaner was not his lifelong dream. As he cleaned the floors, he kept watching the Pizza man work. His goal was to learn as much as he could until he got his opportunity to get in the kitchen.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Fight Equals Opportunity.



After about three months of floor cleaning, dishwashing and general cleaning as needed, the big FIGHT happens. No, not little Efrain. The pizza man which was and are very valuable to any restaurant owner, and Jacomo were yelling at each other. They were arguing on a Friday night, which was always very busy. The only words that Efrain remembers hearing was 'Va Fangula'! That is what the pizza man said to Jacomo and he left. It does not mean goodbye, but was not a friendly term used by Italians either.

Sammi tried to stop the fighting but he could not. The star player was gone and they were stuck. Being that it was Friday, Efrain could not stay and had to leave. They both begged him to stay, but he could not go against his parents and their agreement. Somehow, the two men made it through the evening and then came the next day.

On Saturday, as soon as the sun went down, Efrain showed up at the restaurant ready to work. The opportunity that he was waiting for, was right there. The pizza man never came back. Time to show what he was made of. Had he learned enough by just watching the pizza man every chance he got?



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The Young Boy's Next Test



So, there he was and ready to work. Sammi asks him if he can help in the kitchen and he jumps at the opportunity. He started making pizza right away. They were more than happy that this kid was saving the day. How did he know how to make pizza without being taught? They were not complaining. The customers also were impressed. A new pizza boy, oops, 'man' was born.



Saturday was the busiest night of the week and he really showed that he was more than ready for this. He made pizzas all night as they also were training him to make the other items on the menu. They worked until almost 1:00 in the morning. When he got home, his mother was really unhappy that he had worked so late, but he was so headstrong like his father and stubborn. It runs in the family.

The next morning, he was up and at the restaurant early in order to start his next day. Since he was there early, Sammi and Giacomo were able to teach him some more things. He worked doing food prep and cooked all day and night until after midnight, but was up in time to go to school the next morning.







## CHAPTER NINE

### Show Me the Money!



It was Monday afternoon and Efrain went straight to the restaurant as he always did. He did not get paid yet for the last week and the extra work that he did over the weekend. The \$75.00 was the agreed price, but it was to just do cleaning jobs. He went above and beyond just cleaning and was expecting a nice bonus.

Sammi was just inside the front door and waiting for him with his pay inside of a white envelope like always. Efrain was a little suspicious that he would not get too much extra, but he better have received something more than the \$75.00

He opens the envelope and what do you think that he finds? Yes, \$75.00! Well, when he was younger, he was not as mellow as when he got older. He got the envelope and threw it at Sammi, to Sammi's surprise. He said that he was leaving and not coming back. He knew that they paid the other pizza man a lot of money and he was not going to accept the same pay as a cleaner. Sammi told him to wait as he walked to the back for a few minutes.

When he returned, he had the same envelope, but it now was fatter. He added \$300.00, for a total of \$375.00! Now, this was more like it. He worked until 8:00 that night. They told him that his monthly pay would be \$1500.00 What kind of now 14 year old kid was earning this kind of money? Remember that this was the 70's. Most adults weren't even making that much in the area. **He was learning a very valuable lesson already; increase your value to others and you become valuable. Learn skills that others don't have and you will become more valuable in the marketplace.**



## CHAPTER TEN

### His New Mentors



Even though he was a fast learner and knew how to do many things, he still needed a lot of training. Sammi and Giacomo became mentors to Efrain. They became almost like family. He ended up being known as 'Chico', as became the popular name for Hispanics due to the show 'Chico and the Man'.

Soon his cooking skills just kept increasing and increasing, with the main teachings coming from Sammi. He learned how to make all kinds of Italian dishes. From the simple ones such as foot-long Subs and salads, to the pastas and meat dishes, he was quickly learning it all.

Not too long after that, he became a manager. The way that he was raised to respect and never steal from anyone, helped him to gain all of their trust. They tested him many times but he never touched a penny that did not belong to him. They even trusted him with the combination to their safes. It was pretty evident the way that they felt about him and how much they trusted him, and with good reason. He was left in charge many times and proved his trustworthiness over and over.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Not Just a Manager

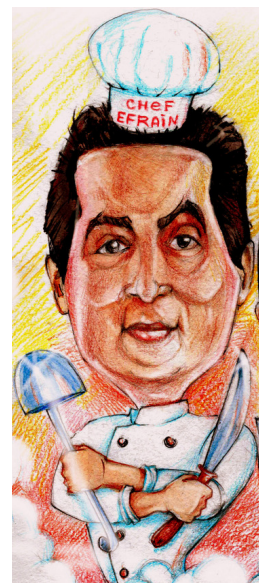
When I think back of when my mom used to tell me that he had saved a lot of money and knew a lot of Italian people, it all makes more sense now. How he always had money and was well respected. Never did I know that he was only 7 years older than me, until about ten years ago.

After being trained for some time and really getting to know each other well, they all formed a great bond. In no time, Efrain learned everything about the restaurant business. Little tips and tricks from the seasoned pros really made him stand out from the rest.

Over the next few years, he worked in a few restaurants as a cook, helped set up new pizza shops and also ended up owning a restaurant with Giacomo. He became so well trained and trusted, that he would actually help them set up restaurants. How far he went in just a few years time is just amazing.

After speaking to one of my older brothers last night, I found out that Efrain fired not only him from a restaurant called Italian Delight, but also my father! They both worked for him for a short period of time. Both of them enjoyed their drinks and did not show up for work more than once, which made my cousin look bad. Giacomo told him that is why he did not hire family and he forced him to fire them.

## Sorry, but ADIOS AMIGOS!







## CHAPTER TWELVE

### Show Me the Restaurants

Here are some of the restaurants that Efrain worked in, set up and the one that he owned:

1. As you know, at Phillips Pizza he worked and eventually managed it.
2. Phillips Pizza in Churchville. I visited him there with my mother before but neither of us remember if it was called Phillips. I know that it was located by the movie theater. He helped to set it up and managed it.
3. Pecora restaurant on Greenmount Avenue in Baltimore. Worked there as one of the cooks. Served many of the Baltimore Orioles baseball team players.
4. Italian Delight, managed it and helped set it up.
5. Frank's Pizza, Cecil County in a mall, where he partnered with Giacomo as an owner.  
( He recently was contacted by Giacomo-2017, after all these years. Giacomo had moved to Italy, owned a restaurant and then came back. Not sure if it is temporary or not)

There were others that he does not remember exact names and locations, so I will not even attempt to guess.







## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### 18 Year Old Owner of a Pizzeria?

The restaurant in Cecil County is the main one that I remember, as I remember my mom taking me there a few times. I didn't really hang out with my cousin but I definitely remember this place. He was already a man and there I was just a boy that wanted a slice of pizza and to play an arcade game that was in there.

**When I was younger, inspiration came from tv. I remember a great show called 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous', which I loved to watch and it did make me want to be like that one day. Somehow, Efrain had these images deeply inside of himself as to being successful and made no excuses. He didn't watch television, he went out and made things happen.**

Efrain understood business and was actually applying principals that made him a businessman by the age of 18. If only I would have realized how much he could have taught me, but I had no clue about business and those kinds of visions yet.

The Cecil County restaurant that he became partial owner of, was due to his grandmother lending him \$120,000.00 and another very unlikely investor: his high school principal, Principal Campasino! This kid had earned some serious respect and trust. His principal loaned him \$50,000.00

When him and Jacomo sold the restaurant to another Italian gentleman, Efrain's share was almost \$300,000.00 After paying his lenders back along other bills and expenses, he was left with about \$100,000.00

Imagine having that amount of money when you are so young that you actually earned and not just given to you by some rich relative or inheritance. Also, it was done legally and ethically. I always wanted to be wealthy also, but when I was young and learned that money could be made easily, let's just say that I did not think of or care about, consequences. I should have taken lessons from him.

In the next chapter, you will see what a kid does, just in order to play a game! All the knowledge that this older cousin had, and all that this other kid was interested in was playing games. No sense in complaining, as we all should just focus on what makes us happy. Live and let live, right? Now, let's see how someone got a cheap foot rub and cleaning.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Time to Wash Some Feet.



The sacrifices he made were evident, as his feet really took a beating. Being around all that food, was also making him eat and get very heavy. 18? You could not tell by looking at him. He was a man already.

I do remember one story that is actually embarrassing to admit. It is funny how writing a book is easier than actually telling people that you don't know personally, some **crazy** things that **you've done in the past**.

If you are old enough to remember the Atari 2600 video game days, you'll also remember that the arcade games were always very popular. I think the one in his pizzeria was Asteroids. I loved that game. I had to be 11 years old, since he was 18. This one day, I went to visit him in his Pizzeria and really wanted to play the game. I didn't have any money but needed quarters to play.

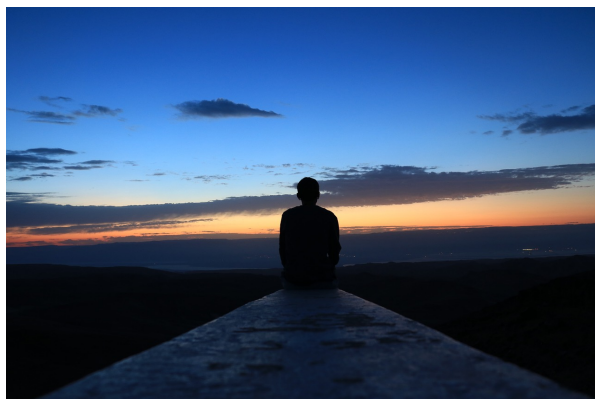
I asked him for some quarters to play the arcade, but what do you think the young businessman said after I asked him for the quarters? No, he did not ask me to scrub the floor with a toothbrush. That would have been too easy. He asked me if I would wash his feet and then he would give me \$5.00, which then I could play many games with. My first reaction was yeah, right...and **NO WAY!** But, thinking about all of the games that I could have played (20), I agreed!

The actual washing, I do not really remember too much , except that it just wasn't something that I would be doing ever again! It was one of those foot bath type of small tubs. The things that you do just to play games when you are little. I reminded him about this recently and he told me to tell his wife about it. The laughs that we got out of that little incident, I tell you.



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### Just Reflecting



When I think back and really do my best to remember him during those days, he just always seemed like he was older. I remember my mother talking about him and his businesses. He always had money and was successful. If I were reading this story, I would question how someone starting at 13 years old and not passing 18, had already been through so much and even partially owned a restaurant, it would just sound crazy.

While most kids at that age are only concerned about playing games, growing up and just having as much fun as you can before you go into adulthood, he was only focused on succeeding and becoming a businessman. What you see as a young child can really impact how you look at life and think about everything. His grandmother inspired him and even his grandfather on his father's side, owned businesses also.

My heart goes out to those that can't find jobs, or good paying ones. That being said, to think how difficult it is for most people to earn a living and just survive, just makes me respect him more and more. It was always hard for him to walk, as long as I can remember, but I never saw him sit back and do nothing.

Several years later, when I was 19, I used to have money due to **some not so legal practices, and at times, I traveled to Florida.** That is a whole other story that I always wanted to share but maybe some other time. When I was able, I helped everyone that I could. Whenever he would introduce me to people, he would say "This is the cousin that I told you about".

I see now that we both admired each other and just really got along well.



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### New life In Florida

Shortly after selling the pizzeria, he ended up moving to Florida and never looked back to Maryland. In 1981, he found the place that he loved and was going to stay in. It was also filled with Spanish speaking people, which he really loved.

Now, I don't want you to think that he had it easy in Florida. He didn't. He went there without knowing anyone except an uncle that lived there with his 3 sons and his wife. **Out of respect for the family members still alive, I won't name their any names.** Before going to Florida, Efrain told this uncle about his plans to open a restaurant in Florida.

He first needed to rent an apartment and then get established. **This** uncle told him that he could stay with him and he would rent out one of his rooms to Efrain. **He was a little tough at times. One time we were driving with him** and my brother **kept** jumping up and down in the back next to me. **Our uncle** warned him to stop, but my annoying little brother continued. I remember my uncle pulling the car over and hitting him in the head with his knuckles. Luckily my mom was there to stop him. A 'cascarazzo' (beating) that none of us would forget.

I don't mean to paint a bad picture of our uncle. He was a good guy that worried for his family and really worked hard to provide for them. **He also** was a very talented sign maker and owned his own business. He made commercial signs for businesses of all sizes. Back in Caguas, Puerto Rico, he was a private detective before he went to Florida, so I do not know how he made the transition.







## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### Meet 'the' Cousin



Efrain had also spoken to this uncle about opening a restaurant together, but that plan came apart and fast. Not even twelve hours passed and that is the amount of time it took for one of his 3 sons to ruin their plans. He was actually the oldest of the three.

I remember this cousin very well, because it seemed that he was always looking for trouble and found it many times. Even while in Maryland for a very short period of time, I had to protect him once. There was a group of about 10 older teenage boys that were going to beat him up over an incident with a girl. I don't remember exactly what he did, but I was the translator and calmed the boys down somehow.

He tried to kiss the girl, I think is what happened, but she didn't like him, especially with the language barrier. I don't know if it was her brother or boyfriend that wanted to beat him up. All I remember is that he had no fear of this large guy, who already had facial hair. I don't even think he feared the group of guys, even though he was only about 14. Fearless and kind of crazy.

Many troubles with the law and just had a very troubled mind and I will leave it at that. His two brothers, were great. They both had terrific personalities and were fun to be around. It's just crazy how family members can be so different even after being raised together after coming from the same parents.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### El Chef Efrain is Robbed



On his first day there, Efrain went to their house and went to take a nice long shower that evening while this uncle went to church with his wife, leaving the boys behind. Efrain happily went shower. When he came out, he noticed that not only his money was missing, but also his jewelry. The thing that hurt him the most, was a bracelet that Sammi had bought him that had 'Chico' engraved on one side and 'Frank' on the other side.

Efrain was furious. When this uncle came home, Efrain told him what had happened. The other two cousins swore that they had not been in the room. This left only the problematic cousin. He then told our uncle that his son stole from him and that he hates 2 types of people: a liar and a thief. Even worse, when it is your own family. This infuriated the uncle and he said 'If we are liars and thieves then you can get out of here'.

I personally knew that 'the' cousin was always in trouble, and his father knew exactly how he was, so I have no idea why it would have been so hard for his father to believe that he would steal from his own cousin. All parents want to help their children and protect them, but there are times that you just have to accept reality and not cover for them.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### This cousin was More Than a Thief



In the first edition of this book, I not only mentioned this cousin's name, but I had also located old newspaper clippings that showed some of his crimes that he committed. After considering it over many times, I decided to remove his name and my uncle's name. I do believe that this is a really important part of El Chef Efrain's Florida story and also might help any female that may have been attacked by a family member or anyone, to come forward.

Several years ago, a family member of mine came to me and told me a disturbing story about this cousin. Not only did he commit several crimes, but he also attacked a female family member in the worst way. She never told anyone what had happened until many years later. After learning this, it really explained some of her behavior and drug use.

I don't know all of the details and really don't want to. Apparently, he talked her into taking a walk into a wooded area and try some kind of drug. This person was trusting and young at the time. If you have a young female family member, always tell them two things: **DON'T TRUST ANYONE FULLY** and allow them to be tricked into doing drugs or anything they don't want to do and **IF ANYTHING BAD EVER HAPPENS TO YOU, DO NOT KEEP IT TO YOURSELF**. Do not worry about any threats that they make. It is never your fault if someone hurts you or forces you to do something. Just be as smart as you can be, to not put yourself in situations where things can be dangerous for you. If I can help even one girl or woman avoid a lifetime of pain, then leaving this part in this e-book will be worth it.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### Justice is Served

I'm not going to continue to talk about **this cousin's** dirty deeds and life, out of respect for his mother and his brothers, but he was lucky that no one knew about what had happened. Many times it is your own family that you can't trust, and that is the scariest thought of all.

I'm sure that things would have turned out differently but God takes care of things in his way and **this man** paid the price after stealing a car and getting into a bad car accident that took his life. It is said that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. This also applies to karma. Punishment might not happen right away, but I am learning that everything you do, good or bad, you pay for.

One last point to make, this uncle came to Efrain and apologized to him when his son died and he needed money for the burial. He realized that his son actually stole the money. Some parents protect their children thinking that it is the right thing to do, but rarely does it help matters. Efrain said that he forgave him, but it was never the same.

Efrain wrote him a check right there, to help with the funeral costs. I don't know if I could have done the same thing. It is so hard to forgive and forget, especially when it is your own family that hurts you. This is another reason that makes him such a special person.





# CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

## Homeless in Orlando



Jumping back to the evening that he got kicked out; this did not happen early morning. It happened very late in the evening, almost midnight. He was left to walk down 441 with no idea where to go or what to do. This was about 1984 and he had no access to the ATM's like we do nowadays. You could not use cell phones to pay for things. I don't remember cell phones at all! There used to be pay phones all over the place. Does anyone a little older remember the expensive collect calls from family members? It was just a totally different time.

So, there he walked down 441 in Orlando on this dark night and the not so best of areas. At nearly midnight, with his suitcase and no money on him, down the road he went. He could not believe what had transpired and was just heartbroken. In a strange place with no access to money until Monday when the banks opened, here he was walking down the street in despair on a Friday night.





## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Meet Victor Davila.



As fate would have it, a man was driving down the same street and noticed him dragging his suitcase, looking lost. The man stopped and asked him where he was going. Efrain says, I don't know. That man's name is Victor Davila. He was just coming from an all-night vigil from his church. Efrain also went to church and was very much into praying and having faith that God would put it all together for him. His mom always prayed for him and all of her family. Never have I seen such a spiritual woman with such a kind soul. At the beginning of this book, that was this very special aunt of mine.

After a very short conversation with Victor, which Efrain did not go into all of the details of what happened with his uncle and the whole story, he tells Efrain to get in the car and go with him. He had a house that was filled with his four children and wife. Last year, I personally met Victor for the first time and he told me that this story was true. He is such a caring man still to this day. He became like another father to Efrain.



## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

### The First Florida Restaurant



He ended up living with Victor for two years. With this man, Efrain opened up his first restaurant in Florida. Victor did not want Efrain to put any money into the business, as he only wanted to be the investor. Efrain's job was to run the place and run it well, he did.

It was called El San Juan Restaurant, located on Orange Avenue in downtown Orlando. He met many people there and his popularity really started growing. He stayed there for about two years but wanted to go off on his own. He always wanted to hold catering events and soon, he got his chance.

He taught Victor and his staff many things but when my cousin left, the business fell apart shortly after. I'm not sure exactly why, but Efrain had so many talents and people just loved him and his food.



## CHAPTER TWENTY- FOUR

### What Other Restaurants Did He Own and/or Manage or Consult?

What Other Restaurants Did He Own and/or Manage or Consult?

1. The San Juan Restaurant
2. El Almendro
3. The Cuban Sandwich Shop
4. El Sabor Latino on International Drive in the Mercado. The Orlando Magazine interviewed him
5. The Quban 434/436 Altamonte Springs, Fl
6. Touch of Class con El Chef Efrain in Winter Park
7. Cafe Madrid
8. Victor's Cafe on Orange Avenue
9. Victorio's in Wekiwa Springs
10. La Lechonera was only several years back
11. El Yunque in Kissimmee for one night only back in 2015 to help his friends
12. El Chef Efrain Creations, that I owned inside of Citgo gas station, in Casselberry 2015- he helped set it up and as a consultant

He also catered many parties and events. That is how he achieved such a high popularity status!







## CHAPTER TWENTY- FIVE: Another Victor???

Now here is where I started to finally get to know who my cousin really was. I was about 19 years old and traveled to Florida several times. He was working at Victorio's restaurant in Wekiwa Springs, with his friend and like another father, Victor. I would go visit the restaurant and got to see Efrain run the show. He was managing the place for Victor after helping him set up the business. Efrain made the transition from business owner to working hand in hand with Victor, without the problems associated with being the owner. The plan worked for both of them.

I remember that Victor was such a great guy and still is to this day. What a compassionate and caring man. He is like an uncle to me, even though I never knew him too well, except in the restaurant. Just by the way that my cousin spoke about him, made me respect this man tremendously. He has helped my cousin so much.

After my cousin set up these first 8 restaurants in a very short time period, he decided to try to work for someone and make similar money without all of the headaches of ownership. One day he came across an ad for a pizza man at Victorio's Pizza in Wekiwa Springs, Florida. He went to meet this man in person to try and get the job.

How embarrassing, I always thought his name was Victorio, until Efrain just corrected me yesterday. Almost everyone calls him 'Pops' or 'Popsy' because he is like everyone's dad and such a great guy.

A while back (2016) I spoke to Victor about his interview with Efrain. While telling me the story, he was laughing and told me what had happened. He told me that he has never seen anyone like Efrain yet, out of all the years and many pizza men that he has hired.

During their interview, Victor told him that he did not think it was the right job for him. He could not understand how such a big man thought that he could work in his busy kitchen and not slow down or mess up the orders. His restaurant was very busy and successful. Well, Efrain tells him that he will work for free and that Victor can decide if he wanted to keep him and what he thought that he was worth.

Victor agreed and the show was on. Not only was he happy with this man, but Victor had never seen anyone move so fast in the kitchen. What amazed him the most, was that there were 15 orders that came in and Efrain only needed to look at the tickets ONCE. He was asked if he needed them to repeat the orders and he said NO. All of the orders were completed on time and perfect.

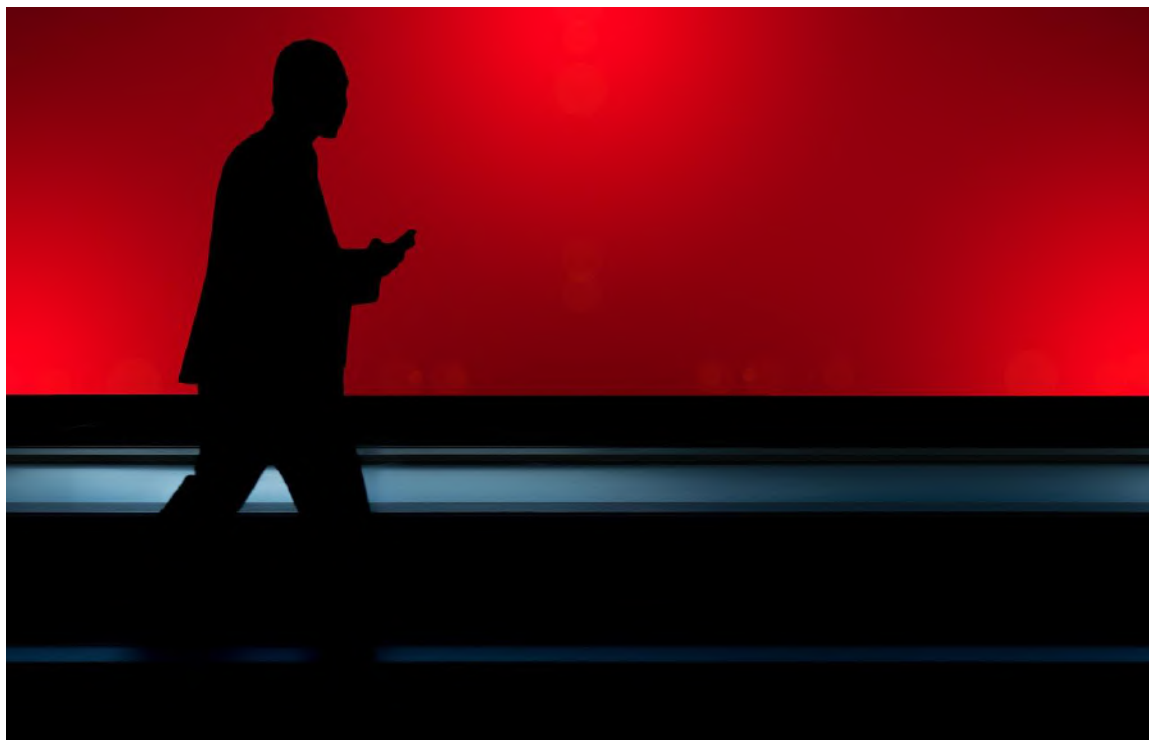
This was the beginning of a long and lasting business and personal relationship between the two. They are still very close and Victor has helped my cousin out many times over the years, even with his own personal struggles. What an honorable man that I admire and respect also. Efrain calls him 'Popsy'.





## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### Can someone have FOUR fathers? Meet 'El Gallo'



When I would go to Florida and even before this, my cousin would mention someone named 'El Gallo'. Okay, maybe he was not another father, let's call him an uncle. This was a successful businessman that had always helped my cousin out. I remember this man from when we lived in Maryland. He would buy cars at an auction in Delaware and drive them to Florida, if my memory serves correct.

Normally, I wouldn't remember people from such a long time ago but this man stood out. I do not know his real name and I would not write it anyway, as he was very secretive and private. He was well respected and feared by many. He owned many businesses and was very financially successful. For some reason, he got along well with my cousin and was even kind of like a bodyguard.

He ended up passing away many years ago, but I mention him because he was another very influential person in my cousin's life that I remember him talking about with so much respect. No more fathers after this, don't worry!



## CHAPTER TWENTY- SEVEN

### His Rise to Popularity

After doing my research, I finally came to realize why he became so popular in the Orlando and Central Florida areas; By participating in, promoting and even coordinating events that he catered for. Many of these events had popular and famous musical artists from different parts of the world, but mostly Puerto Rico. So many different types of Latinos came to these events and fell in love with his cooking and him as well.

His first event was the first ever La Gran Fiesta Del Batey, which is what started him on his journey to bring food and entertainment to the Spanish Community.

From around 1988 to 1992, is when he contracted these Spanish bands to come to Orlando and surrounding areas to perform at these catered events. He became known as 'El Chef Efrain' throughout the Spanish community. When Hispanics love you, you know it. The mystery for me was solved.

He is always full of energy and has true compassion for others. Being such a big man with an even bigger heart, he just has that character that people admire. He never likes to hear negative things and how you can't do something.

Any time that I need something from him, he never says no, unless he's in the hospital or if he just can't. Never any excuses.

After his father passed away in April of 1992, he did become depressed and stopped hosting these events for awhile. He was very close to his father and it really affected him, but he always found a way to get up and keep pushing forward.



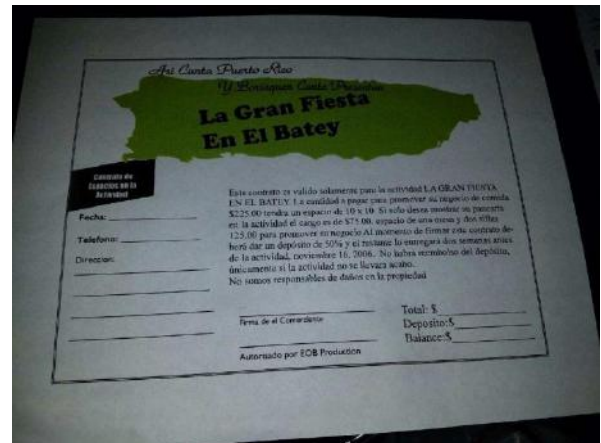
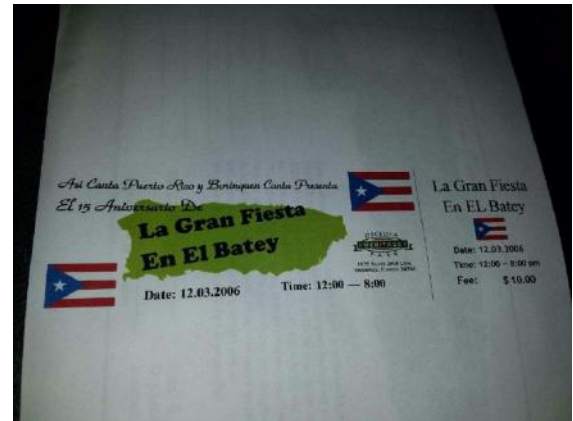


## CHAPTER TWENTY- EIGHT

### Where Were the Events?

Some of the places that he catered for and helped to orchestrate were:

1. The Central Florida Fairgrounds, located on West Colonial Drive in Orlando, is where he had "La Gran Fiesta del Batey". He held about 5 events there in total.
2. Hyatt in Kissimmee
3. The Winter Park Civic Center
4. Asociacion Borinqueno
5. Asociacion Cubano on Hoffner
6. Maitland Civic Center
7. Sheraton Twin Towers on International Drive by Universal Studios
8. The Deltona Community Center (Las Gran Noches del Luquillo")
9. Florida Fairgrounds in Tampa





## CHAPTER TWENTY- NINE

### Local Orlando Radio Stations and Personalities

There were several local Orlando radio stations that supported him and helped him to promote the events. Radio 11Q, it is now called 1030 La Grande and La Voz 1440 AM - WPRD are the two main stations that promoted him. Both are still popular today.

The owner of 1030 AM, Jorge Arollo, used to help him promote his events and is still a very close friend to this day.

Then you have Lucymar Rivera. She has a popular morning show currently in the Orlando area and is a very close friend to him still to this day. She was the Master of Ceremonies at several of the events.

I also remember him talking about "Quedate con Miguel" as he was good friends with the host Miguel Negrón, that passed away many years ago. Miguel's son still runs the show at the time of this writing and even his grandson, Fernando Negrón Jr. was working at the station for awhile.

Many people know Efrain through the radio, as he has called in many times and talked on those two stations for many years.

These are just a few more of the people that helped or became friends with and helped him over the years by interviewing, promoting or announcing some of his events:

1. Julio Mario Morales-Advertising Manager/Program Director-1400 AM-Sanford,FL.
2. Mario "Michelin" Villalobos, also known as El Lobo Feliz.
3. Homan Machuca; Senior News Anchor at Telemundo Orlando.
4. Polito Vegas from New York. Used to record announcements for marketing.
5. Eddie Vazquez-El Master de La Salsa







## CHAPTER THIRTY

### Even More Friends in Florida

There are many more popular and influential people in Florida that he knows but I can not locate all of them and it would make this book too long. I apologize for leaving many out if you are one of his close friends.

Just last week, I spoke to Efrain and he told me that he was talking to someone that he wanted to introduce me to. He is known to always put me on the spot and talk to people that I do not know, but that is just him and it's fine.

This man was a trumpet player for El Gran Combo and runs a mavi business in Kissimmee, Florida. Mavi is a popular drink with Latinos. They didn't even recognize each other. Efrain asks him if he knows El Chef Efrain and the guy says 'Claro', which means sure, but he says 'You are not him'. My cousin laughs and tells him some things to make him believe that he is who he says he is.

The man tells him that he used to be in the band and they remember each other at this point. Next thing you know, I am on the phone with this guy and he is telling me that he remembers him and how he inspired him and worked for him. His name is Abinal Roman.

Remember that this guy knows Efrain many years ago and he tells me that my cousin weighed 600 pounds and he remembers my cousin struggling to walk but he was always on the go. He then told my cousin that he used to watch him and just admired him so much. My cousin never knew that the guy was inspired by him.



I do not know many of his friends, but there have been so many people that are famous, and some that were just very special in his life, like Joey Morales. He even catered for Jed Bush, even though Efrain is not affiliated with or into politics.

This actually reminds me of a time that he went to a famous television station and they were expecting the sitting President to go on the show. A representative of this President wanted Efrain to be interviewed BUT the show's host told him not to let them use him and his personal story to help them gain popularity, so he did not allow them to talk to him.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### A Lawsuit for Using a Picture?.



Another thing that just came to mind is a person that I won't even mention her name for fear of some possible lawsuit. When I had the restaurant in Casselberry, I mentioned her in one of the ads because my cousin knows her personally.

Shortly afterwards, someone claiming to be a drummer for her, called and told Efrain to take it off of the ad or there would be some kind of consequences. He called my cousin and was mad that her name was used. He had no idea that I created the ad and I thought that it was no big deal, so this is why I am being more careful in this book.

Honestly, I do not know who she is but the person is very popular and stopped into my restaurant more than once to see him. She has been an acquaintance of my cousin for several years. This wasn't her fault but it was just something that I wanted to share. That is all that I will say about that.

No name was mentioned and I am not saying anything bad about this person. She really had nothing to do with anything. This was just used as an example and how you have to be very careful.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### Who Did he Bring to Florida or Cater for their Events?



This next chapter is going to be the longest chapter because I want to explain a little bit about the artists that he knew, brought to Florida or catered their events. I know that not everyone listens to music or goes to events, so this will just let you know a little about these amazing artists. They are not in any particular order.

The information about them was received from the internet, so I apologize if anything is wrong. I tried to keep the description short and simple, just to let you know who they are and some of their accomplishments. Some of these artists even performed for free at charity events that my cousin hosted.





## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### The List of Famous and Popular Music Artists that performed

**# 1 Gilberto Santa Rosa:** Also known as "El Caballero de la Salsa" (The Gentleman of Salsa), is a Puerto Rican bandleader and singer of salsa and bolero. Santa Rosa developed a unique style of "soneo" (improvisation) in salsa that permitted him to be successful in both the "tropical" and "romantic" styles of the music.

**#2 Jossie Esteban y la Patrulla 15:** A leading merengue band from Dominican Republic, formed by Jossie Esteban (born Esteban Grullón) and Alberto Martínez (known as Ringo). The group was formed by these Dominican childhood friends in May 1979, and included musicians from Puerto Rico, but mostly Dominican Republic.

**#3 Luis Felipe Rodríguez:** Better known as Felipe "La Voz" Rodríguez, (May 8, 1926 – May 26, 1999) He was born in Caguas, Puerto Rico and was a singer of boleros. He is regarded as the most popular Puerto Rican male singer of the 1950s based on record sales and live audience records. I remember my father singing and playing 'La Ultima Copa' on his guitar. He sounded like him a lot.

**#4 El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico:** Commonly known as El Gran Combo, is a Puerto Rican Salsa music orchestra based in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2012, it is Puerto Rico's most successful musical group, and is considered the most popular Salsa

group that has ever existed. Many famous salsa musicians and singers developed their careers by starting with the group, (particularly Andy Montañez)

or who were occasionally backed up by the band (including Celia Cruz, Héctor Lavoe and La India).

**#5 Iris Chacón Tapia:** (born March 7, 1950 in San Juan, Puerto Rico) is a Puerto Rican dancer, singer, and entertainer. She enjoys great popularity in Puerto Rico (where she had a weekly variety show for more than a decade) and in other Latin American countries. I remember her when I was younger. What a beautiful woman.

**#6 Andrés Montañez:** (born May 7, 1942), better known as "El Godfather de la Salsa" "El Niño De Trastalleres" is a Puerto Rican singer and songwriter. Montañez first gained fame as a member of the internationally successful El Gran Combo group, with songs like "Hojas blancas" (White Leaves), "Un verano en N.Y." (A Summer in NY) On November 2, 2006, Montañez won his first Latin Grammy for Best Traditional Tropical Album, together with Pablo Milanés.

Montañez was selected to form part of a benefit concert titled "Somos Haití", where funds would be gathered to support Haiti after the 2008 hurricane season.





**#7 Celia Cruz:** She was a Cuban-American singer, and was one of the best known and most popular salsa performers of all time. She had 23 gold albums.

**#8 Daniel Santos** (June 6, 1916 – November 27, 1992) was a singer and composer of boleros, and an overall performer of multiple Caribbean music genres, including guaracha, plena and rumba. He became known as "El Jefe" and "El Inquieto y Anacobero".

**#9 Eddie Santiago:** Santiago's career took off in 1984 in Puerto Rico and the rest of Latin America as a soloist, forming his own band, and recording many songs including: "Tú me quemas", "Me Fallaste" and his best known hit "Lluvia" (Rain, not to be confused with Menudo's hit of the same name) and many others.

**#10 Trío Los Panchos:** Also known as Los Panchos, was an internationally famous Latin Trío Romántico known for its romantic ballads and boleros.

They met in 1944, in New York City. The three original members were Alfredo Gil and Chucho Navarro, both from Mexico, and Hernando Avilés from Puerto Rico. All three played guitar and contributed vocally.

**#11 Papo Valle y Su Trio Borinquen:** My research shows that he is currently in Orange City, Florida. Papo had a show back in December of 2015, at the Lehman Center in New York, which had to do with the Parranda. The band was originally formed by Puerto Rican composer Rafael Hernández and later joined by another Puerto Rican composer Pedro Flores, in 1926. Style of music; ballads and bolero.

**#12 Pete "el Conde" Rodriguez:** He was, for many years, the lead singer and a major contributor to the success of Johnny Pacheco's sensationally popular conjunto. Salsa legend Pedro Juan Rodriguez Ferrer, was born on January 31st, 1933. El Conde was the moniker given to him by his hairdresser and means 'The Count' in Spanish.

**#13 Los Hijos de Puerto Rico:** They were a tropical band from the Puerto Rico during the 1990's. Some of their songs were 'Amor De Novela', 'Esposa O Amante' and 'Fiesta en la Vecindad'.

**#14 El Negrito del Baitey:** Baitey Alberto Amancio Beltran, was a Dominican singer, known as "El Negrito del Batey". As a child, the economic situation of his family forced him to sell goods in the streets. At fourteen years old he was drawn to music and made his debut as an amateur singer on the radio. He became loved by not only Dominicans but also Puerto Ricans and other Spanish nations.



**#15 Octavio Ramos Pumarejo:** Known professionally as Tavín Pumarejo, was a Puerto Rican jíbaro singer and comedian. While better known for his work as a comedy actor on Puerto Rican television, Pumarejo released 16 albums of Puerto Rican music, with some of them becoming major hits in the island.

**#16 Jose Miguel Class:** Nicknamed "El Gallito de Manatí" ("Manatí's Bantam"). Class achieved fame in Puerto Rico in the 1960s before moving to Mexico, where he achieved wide success. His period as a resident there proved important for his career: He released various Mexican music albums and he was able to achieve fame across Central America, South America and the rest of the Caribbean

**#17 Johnny Ventura** originally Juan de Dios: He was called 'El Caballo Negro' and born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. In 1959, he decided to take the name 'Johnny Ventura'. He started his career as a singer in several bands that presented themselves at the dances in La Feria and also worked with the orchestra of Rondón Votau.

**#18 Odilo Gonzales:** Known as "El Jibarito de Lares" is a Puerto Rican singer and living legend. He was born in Lares, Puerto Rico. He became a popular child star after being on radio performances in the capital city of San Juan. He possessed one of the rarest and most beautiful voices of all Puerto Rican singers. He also served as an inspiring source to the emergence of the Dominican style of music called bachata.

**#19 El Cuarteto de Los Hispanos:**

They had its humble beginning about the year 1952 as an experiment, and then with its success they were presented by radio and later by tv. At the beginning the group had some changes and then brought in the following members; Wilson Torres, Carmelo Montalvo, Tato Díaz and Charlie Vázquez. They achieved harmony in voices and guitars. The trio dissolved in the 1990's.

**#20: Los Tres Reyes:** Is a music group initially linked to the Trío Romántico style, comparable to Los Panchos. They expanded to perform varied Latin American music. Gilberto and Raúl Puente, twins, were founders of the group in 1957. Gilberto played the requinto very well and was able to imitate the Los Panchos style easily. The group continued into the 1970s, but took a fifteen-year hiatus before re-forming in 1991. They might still be performing now.

**#21 Trio Los Condes:** A Puerto Rican music trio that has had international success throughout Latin America and in the United States. The trio has released several albums, including collaborations with Tito Lara, Armando Manzanero, Julio Angel, Manny Manuel and others.

There are many more, but you see that he cooked for and worked with many performers that I am sure remember and admire him.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

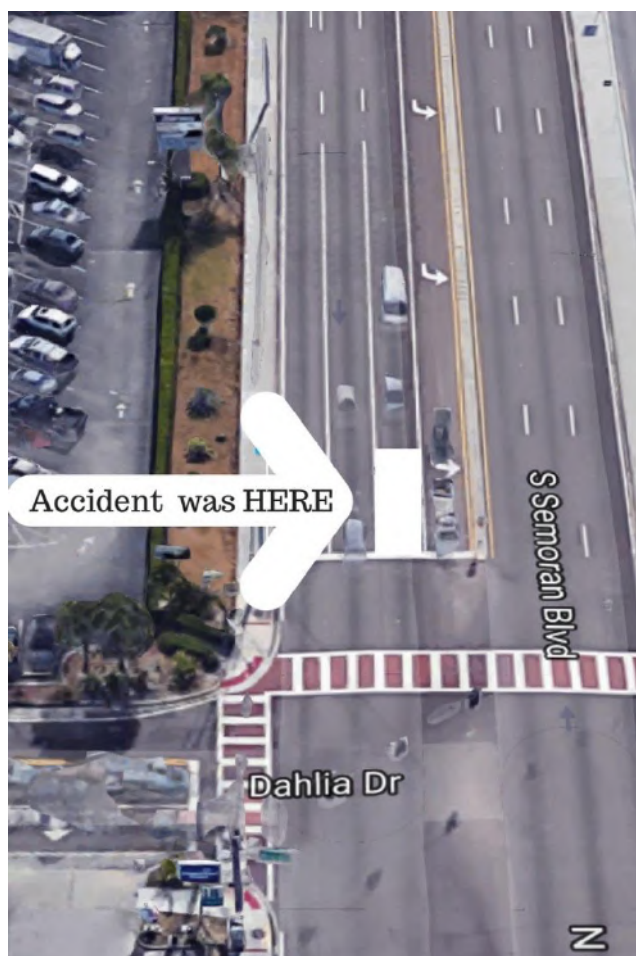
### The Night that Changed His Life Forever

As mentioned in the beginning, the horrific accident that he had on November 7, 1997 would change his life forever. It was late night and he was driving home when all of a sudden, here comes this car that smashed into him head on. There was nothing that he could do to avoid the accident. This pushed the van into the path of other cars and in total, he believes it was 5 cars that hit him.

This happened on a Friday night, two days before one of his festivals. It was the Jibaro Festival. A friend of his lent him a Ford van so that he could pick up from the airport, some of the performers. After dropping them off at their hotel, he was driving through Azalea Park on his way to Marylou records to pick up some money from ticket sales.

Two strange things happened that night. Just before the accident he says that he heard a voice that told him to turn to the right, but he ignored it and thought that he was hearing things. The second thing was that some witnesses claimed that they saw someone with him, but yet he was alone. I don't doubt anything anymore after hearing about so many crazy stories.

Many people rushed to get to the scene when they heard that the great chef was involved in this accident. There is a newspaper clipping in the site below that talks about his accident and how the people at the Jibaro Festival missed him and other comments.



[www.elchefefrain.com](http://www.elchefefrain.com)



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### A Long Road to Recovery

Now picture this man that already had problems walking and had to be over 500 pounds, having his left leg ripped off and hanging by the skin and his right foot being broken in three places. The doctors that put him back together, I can't praise or thank enough. They were able to save his life and put his leg on and reconstruct it basically. All kinds of rods and screws were used to achieve this.

It took him about five years to get out of his bed and walking again. Years of therapy and his strong mind was finally able to make him rise up and get moving on his own, astonishing doctors and people that took care of him. The many times that I saw him and wondered if it was even possible for him to walk again. The compassionate therapists and nurses were just incredible.

One of the things that I admired about him the most, was that even though he struggled to even walk, you could not stop this man. Never. Lazy? That is one word that can describe me sometimes but him??? NEVER. He almost does not sleep, maybe due to the pain that he is in, I really don't know. I almost never heard him say that he was tired. Never have I heard him complain and feel sorry for himself. The circumstances that have been brought to him would have crushed most people. I'm very strong willed but I don't even know if I could have gone through what he has without quitting.

The pain that I have watched him go through is so hard to watch. I've literally seen blood shoot out of his leg non-stop via little holes, perhaps because of his blood thinning medicines. For years when I would see his legs, they were and are very dark and black sometimes. The poor circulation is the problem. No idea how he still has both of his legs. Whatever angel or other power that is watching over him, has really earned their pay.

Over the years I have helped him also with medicine and other things when I could. Some of those medicines were natural and helped him with pain. Also, I've tried to help him realize the power of the mind in healing but he already knows this very well. He has taken many natural supplements that have helped him get stronger also.

Writing this, I feel bad that I drove a little crazy with him in the past, not really realizing how traumatized that he still was, because of this accident. He still drives to this day, which also is amazing to me. How he can coordinate his foot to perfection is unbelievable.





## CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

### His Last Big Test?

Hopefully this next test that I am going to tell you about, will be his last big one. I honestly can not tell you which of these 'tests' were worse. How or why such a good man has been through so much pain and suffering, I'll never understand.

You already know that he was up to almost 600 pounds at his largest weight and about many of his struggles. The weight was always an issue and has really complicated his life to the point where he had to do something. The extra pain of walking by being so large and after the accident, was just unbearable anymore.

What am I talking about? He decided to get weight loss surgery about 2009. It was a tough decision as he knew that many people had complications and even died from it. On the other hand, there were also many people that lost a lot of weight and it actually saved their lives.

For this surgery, he needed to come up with about \$25,000.00 or he could not get it done. After a lot of asking his church and other people to help him, he was finally able to afford to do it. In his case, it was basically a life-saving surgery, as he was even having trouble breathing at night because of the weight.

First, he had to go through many tests to see if he was eligible or not. Blood tests, heart tests, psychological and others. Soon, he was cleared and ready to go. I happened to go down there and visit him before and after the surgery. There were such caring nurses in the hospital. I remember one that really stood out and went out of her way to help him. Most nurses and doctors really are some caring people. The amount of people's lives that they save and show compassion to, is just astounding.

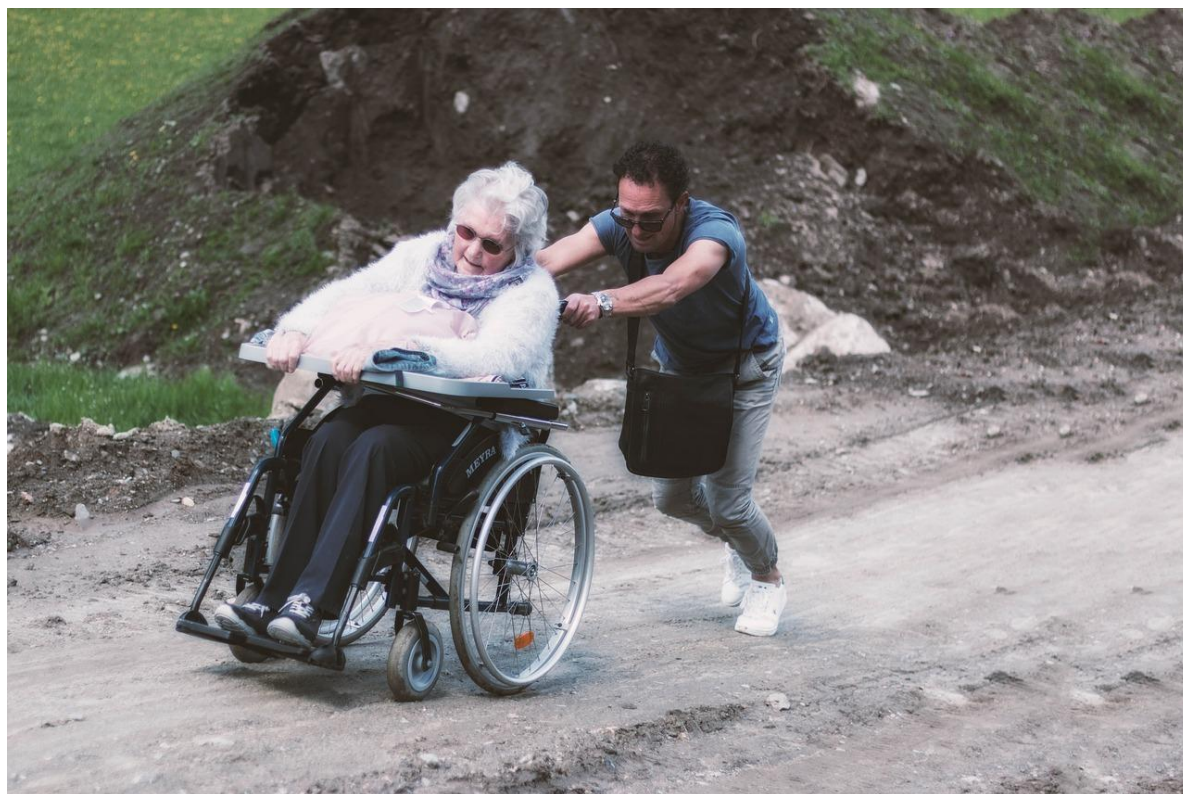
Also, I just thought of all the caring people in his and his mother's church. Wow. I got to personally meet some of them and they really impressed me with their compassion. They had helped Efrain and his mother over the years, and Efrain had also catered for them and helped them many times as well. A special thank you to all of them at the Altamonte Springs Church on Maitland avenue. The pastors there are also truly caring and compassionate people.

No doctors names were mentioned that performed any surgery, a nurses first name was mentioned, but I removed it. No hospital names were mentioned and I am not talking bad anyone that took care of him. It is common knowledge that anyone who goes in for any surgery takes risks. It is up to you to decide about those risks and what is right for you. All I am doing is sharing a personal story of what happened to my cousin. There are many different hospitals that do weight loss surgery and for this type of surgery, to the best of my knowledge, you have to sign a waiver. There is nothing secret about that. This book is not to promote nor make you not get any surgery at all. This is always your personal decision. I suggest that you research and get other medical opinions when you do any kind of procedure.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

### Special Bond with His Mother.



His mother did not leave his side the whole time. My Aunt Nicolasa was such a special mother. They took care of each other and needed each other in many ways. Due to their limited income, they lived together just to make ends meet and to be able to eat.

For many years they had lived with each other and there was no embarrassment about it. A special bond that could not be broken. Even though he is married now, his wife knows that no one can ever take the place of his mother. He could never see putting her away in any kind of nursing home and he can not forget all of the years that she was there for him. His brother Noel had been helping them for some time as well, when he could. Noel is just a very special person who took after his mother and has nothing to feel bad about. Another very honorable man that I just can't tell you how much I respect. My aunt really did a great job in touching so many people's lives and she really lived for her family. Her grandchildren were her heart also. She is missed greatly.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### Surgery is a Success?



I haven't mentioned any names of the hospital nor any doctors, and am not even writing anything that is not known as possible complications to the surgery, so I do not expect to hear from any hospital reps as this is all true and not meant to attack them.

Through the process there were many delays and complications. Many blood transfusions later, he was still in the hospital and in need of other surgery. Even though this was the most recent surgery that I can remember, it is difficult for me to remember all of the details. He was losing a lot of blood but they had no clue as to where it was coming from.

All of the money went into getting the initial surgery but since there were complications, the hospital and/or the doctors needed even more money for any treatments to save his life. This just was not fair and most likely covered in the documents that you sign when you agree to the surgery. You almost literally sign your life away if anything goes wrong.

There were many other tests that were done to try to see where the problem was, but nothing was working and they were running out of options. To say that the surgery was a success would be a lie. According to him, the surgery was only partially completed because they could not finish due to this internal bleeding that led to a large ball of hard blood or 'clot' that this blood turned into.



## CHAPTER THIRTY- NINE: Released a Healthy Man?

When it came time to be released, it was basically a death sentence. He was told by one doctor, and I was the translator, that they could not perform the surgery because it was too dangerous. This ball of blood was the size of a football!

He was released basically to die. What the doctor told us was that the body can heal itself and that this would just shrink on its own. Drink a lot of healthy milkshakes for nutrition and things would work out. I then bought him some more of these drinks and also other natural remedies that I believe truly helped.

After being released, he not only had bad leg pains, but also very bad pains in his stomach. This only lasted about 8 years! He is still having this pain and worse. At the time of this writing, now it's March of 2018, but in July of 2017 he was in the hospital bleeding from his private area. This lasted for quite a long time.

This blood 'clot' if that is the proper term, has wrapped around his kidney and liver, which is very dangerous. In the same timeframe, July 2017, he had surgery to see if a specialist could do anything for him. They inserted three instruments or tubes up his private area to see what is going on. He had been bleeding non-stop from there since this procedure. It is really a never ending nightmare for him.

I spoke to him and he was released from the hospital after spending the day there. He had to wait six days to see the specialist again. After many prayers from many people, he made it through those hard times. I do not believe in many things, but prayer is something that is powerful. Our minds are more powerful than we think.







## CHAPTER FOURTY

### Doctor Follow Ups.



As for the follow ups, one of these follow ups really stands out to me and is touching. During this visit, one of the doctors that performed the surgery was shocked to see him in his office months later. In his heart, he knew that Efrain was not supposed to survive more than a short period of time, but he was still alive, though in tremendous pain. During the visit, the doctor literally cried and said that he now believes in God.

No, he never directly said that there was any liability nor did he admit that they did anything wrong, but I believe that his conscience was getting to him and he could not do much about it.

An interesting fact that I learned years ago, is that the top three professions for suicides usually were dentists, psychiatrists and doctors. It may have changed now, but this was pretty consistent. They are so compassionate mostly and save so many lives that I have to give them a lot of respect and admiration. I don't believe they ever want to hurt people intentionally.



## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### The Trips to Venezuela



The only reason that he is alive today is that he went to Venezuela to see some doctors that not only use some traditional methods, they also use natural cures and medicines. After the surgery no one would touch him because mostly for liability issues, I believe. When someone else starts working on a patient, it is expected that they tend to the patient until they are well again. No one wants to try to help someone and get sued for something that they had no part in.

As for Venezuela, wow, so many things that I can write but that would be another book. In short, he stayed at first in a hospital that you did not even have pillows. The conditions in these hospitals are mostly very bad. That being said, he found some of the most beautiful people in there world over there. The compassion that these people showed him, he will never forget.

Several of them have passed away or have been having some really hard times due to the political climate and economy. I wish more of them were able or would make the effort to grow their own food and become less dependent on the government, but let me not go into this too much.

These people opened their hearts to him when they saw what he was going through. They work under such stressful conditions and really put their lives on the line just to do this. He made friends with many of them and even was able to stay in a doctor's home. His job was to do the cooking and he now has some fans in Venezuela!



## CHAPTER FOURTY-TWO

### The Chef Finally Meets his Future Wife



I do not want to leave his wife out of the book. They met over the internet several years back and just really got to know each other well. He told her from the beginning 'Estoy esplotado' which is a term for being banged up and in bad shape. He did not show a picture of when he was younger or mislead her.

She must have respected his honesty and they both fell in love. It seemed like such a long time to go through the red tape involved with bringing her to Florida. We were trying to help her get here to the U.S. but were getting nowhere. It took a famous Hispanic judge to get her to him. I was waiting to get her permission to use her name, but have not received it yet. I asked him awhile back to find out for me. I'll just say that she is on television a lot.

After years of waiting, she is finally here with him and helping to take care of him and his wounds. She is a very special woman that has stuck by his side through it all. It must not be easy for either of them but they are pushing forward everyday to make progress and just survive.



## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

### They are Robbed



I'm writing this next chapter as a small warning to people. I debated with my cousin a couple of times about the safety of Venezuela. He says that crime can happen anywhere and he is right, but if you are in certain high crime areas, your chances greatly increase. There are so many good people in Venezuela and this in no way is to attack them.

During one of his first visits there, a blonde and beautiful woman, came up to him and told him that she would go with him if he would buy her a hamburger and a drink. This was right in front of Mayra, his wife!

It just makes me so mad that anyone has to go through this just to survive. Virtually no one wants to live in poverty and not know where their next meal is coming from. So much pain and suffering in this country, and any country really.

Getting to the robbery; it happened one day when he just flew in from the airport. He was bleeding from his stomach area but it was patched up. A few guys came up to them and demanded money. It happened so fast and there was not much that he could do. He told them not to hurt her and take what they wanted.

One of the guys pushed him, which injured him even more and then they left. Lucky for them that it was not any worse, as some of these robberies end in death. This was several years ago and the climate is actually worse now.

Recently, I asked about the first doctor that took care of him and let him into his home. He was killed within the last year after not fully complying with some thieves.





## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

### What did Venezuela Actually Do for Him?

Somehow, they were able to pinpoint where the leak was coming from. I do not know exactly how they did it. At this point, the football sized 'blood ball' was the size of a basketball and they had to work fast to save his life.

They used certain equipment to see where it was and how to get to it. Then came the treatments. If I tell you that there were many herbs used, would that be believable? In our society, no. If I told you that one of the treatments included the coca plant that is used to create an illegal substance in the U.S., would you think that this is an illegal operation?

There are so many things that are kept from us by pharmaceutical companies and big corporations. At this point in time, everyone knows this. I will not go into an attack on them because I have found out when you start taking on these giants, you will get crushed.

What did Venezuela do for him? They saved his life. Maybe if he would have had money and better insurance, he could have received more help. Perhaps the surgery was too dangerous, again, I do not know as I am not a doctor. What I do know is that in this relatively poor country ( I say that with the utmost of respect and not to criticize ), they did what we could or would not do, for a lot less and by using natural alternatives mostly.

The total amount paid by donations from his church, family and friends, was over \$5,000.00 to the doctors and hospitals. The equivalent surgeries and treatments here, if they could have even done them, would have been hundreds of thousands more.





## CHAPTER FOURTY-FIVE

### How has he Survived all of These Years?



In the financial sense, he has been on some type of disability for many years. The size that he was, really was the first problem. His feet really took a beating as he would stand on them for many hours everyday. After so many years, they just couldn't take standing up like that.

It astounds me that he can do anything with his feet the way that they were and even worse now. Over the years he would cater some small events for his church and friends. I tried to get him some catering events, but did not really push it the way that I could have. Though he really needs to make some money, it is hard for me to locate clients knowing how much pain that he is in and the danger that it poses to him until he can get rid of this internal problem.

I am not saying that he can't do it, because I know that he can. I consider myself to be in great shape, even though I do not exercise. All that I do is follow the vegan diet, which is not for everyone. I bet that he can still outlast me if there was some type of challenge. The drive that this man has is unlike anyone that I have seen.

His positive attitude and faith in some power that is protecting him, has helped him to survive all of these years. He is a very spiritual person which I believe, is his secret sauce to even being alive right now. My belief is that we are all spiritual beings and these bodies are just our vessels while we are here. He has harnessed some type of power that most of us have not.



## CHAPTER FORTY- SIX

### What is he Doing Today?

These past few months have been extra rough on him, which also inspired me to finally write this book. He has been in and out of hospitals, doctors offices and pharmacies for years, but lately it has been even more serious. In this updated version, his mother passed away and he is really taking it hard.

He has not been able to afford to get back to Venezuela for a long time and the focus was to get his wife to him, which he finally was able to do. I've worked on helping him get catering events but have not really pushed it because I know that he can only handle so much.

Nothing has been easy for him his whole life really. When I look at my problems, all that I have to do is think of his problems and challenges. It makes me appreciate just having my legs to walk and everything that I have. We all want more out of life, but sometimes you just have to be thankful for what you do have.

Over the past several years, he not only helped me in my restaurant as a consultant but also has done the same for church events when he had the chance and even helped some friends of his when he could.







## CHAPTER FORTY- SEVEN

### Always Willing to Help Others

Even with all of his problems, he still finds the time to help others when possible. There are just too many examples to list, but I will just write some and finally get to finishing this book, as I am excited to finally get it out.

When I had my restaurant, he would get there early morning and before I was able to get there most of the time. Without his help, I would never have had any chance at success as cooking is not my best talent. He did teach me a lot about prepping but I left that up to him mostly.

I remember one day that the restaurant was closed and it was my job to cut some onions. He left and came back about three hours later and I still wasn't finished! He just laughed and a client that owned a few stores came in and they just laughed at me. Not making fun, but it was funny and sad at the same time. Not only did it take me a long time, but I cut them too small! Good memories.

One day a lady contacted me about a charity event for a friend of hers that had cancer. I told Efrain about it and he did not even think twice about it. I lost money on the order but did not care. He made the prices and said if it was to help someone that he would do it. It was on a Saturday, I believe and I delivered the order myself.

It was not super successful but I did get to meet some beautiful people from Casselberry, Florida. I had some tomato slices and pickles on a hot dog roll with mustard and ketchup as there were not many vegan options. It was delicious! I'm not hard to please when it comes to food.

I lost thousands of dollars due to the gas station being leased out to someone else and they ended up kicking us out after about six months. This is what happens when you do not get a signed agreement in place as I had warned, but it is what it is and does not pay to complain.





## CHAPTER FOURTY- EIGHT

### Why Were we Kicked Out?

There was a female manager in the gas station, that was not managing the place properly, to say the least. There were allegations that she was stealing from the store. All that I will say is what I saw one night while sitting outside in my car just outside of the side where the restaurant was.

We had never met and I had just came in to town from New York. There was a girl sitting at the dining area and I saw this woman go into our refrigerator and take something to give to the girl, who ended up being her daughter. I did not see what it was but think it was a drink. I took a picture of the girl and showed my cousin the next day. He has zero tolerance for theft and told the manager asking her about it.

She denied stealing anything and he said that it was his cousin that saw her. Well, needless to say, she did not like me and we never even spoke to each other. During the transfer of ownership, this manager told the new owners that my cousin was a thief and just talked bad about him. They already wanted to start their own food service in there but this just helped them make up their minds.

She was hired to work for them and they actually caught her stealing but refused to prosecute because she was supposedly pregnant. At the present time, the owners want my cousin back and have been almost begging him because many of his clients keep asking where he is.

We were both working on getting him in there and I would manage the marketing, but their is a financial investment needed and more importantly, his health was not the best. He tells me that he feels better and is ready to do whatever is necessary to get something going.





## CHAPTER FOURTY- NINE

### El Chef Efrain to the Rescue

One night in 2015, he even helped some friends of his in their restaurant. He didn't do it for the money as he knew that they were just starting out. He helped because he knew that they really needed it. He had no financial interest in the business at all. He was asked to help and really was not in shape to go there at all. Even sitting down and helping, it was difficult. Somehow he did it. The owners invested a lot in the 'Yunque Restaurant' in Kissimmee, Florida.

They really wanted him in there full time but he could not do it. After hiring some other chefs to help them get off the ground, things just did not work out. Another chef that I will not mention, had a crew of about five others that were in training and there to support him, just were not able to do the job right.

One of the owners told me that this crew not only did not do their jobs well, but they also ate some of the more expensive foods that were purchased for the restaurant. My cousin had little to work with when he went there for one night to help out. I even helped out as a dishwasher. It was a great team effort and with the marketing, it all came together. We ended up going there one more time after this. It was an experience that I won't forget.

When people heard that the great El Chef Efrain was going to be there, many came from all over just to eat his cooking. It was incredible to see him work and remember the orders. I can't even remember one sometimes! The pressure never got to him. He had catered for thousands and never cracked under pressure. Everyone was loving his food and amazed at how well he performed that night.

I remember getting five people in line at the gas station restaurant and thinking this was a lot. We had a lot of laughs there. A few arguments also, because there is always stress in any business, but we always managed to work things out.

Lastly, he had helped these friends before in their restaurant 'La Lechonera' which specialized in pernil or roasted pork.



## CHAPTER FIFTY

### Award Winning Chef

I forgot to mention that he had also won awards over the years. He even gave me some expensive cookware that he won from one of his contests, that I treasure and just love cooking food in. Every time I would go visit him, he would cook for me out of this expensive looking stainless steel cookware. There were some that he had never used and he knew that I liked them, so one day when I was leaving back to NY, he gave me some. Best gifts ever.

He even won a golden fork in Disney, years ago. The prize money that he won was given to charity. There are even other instances where he won some competitions. Recently, when the Presidential Campaign was going on, he was chosen out of many chefs from Hillary Clinton's campaign team, to cook for them at an event. It ended up falling through because she did not win F

He even cooked for Jed Bush several years back at the Green Barn on the Lake in Kissimmee, Florida.

When the opportunity presents itself, he serves as a consultant to people to just make ends meet.





## CHAPTER FIFTY ONE

### Testimonials

#### 1. Eddie Vazquez; El Master De La Salsa

I just had the pleasure of speaking to Eddie Vazquez. My cousin was able to get his phone number by calling into one of the radio stations and asking around. This man was there when Efrain hosted his first event, called Jibaro Festival Canto a Puerto Rico.

He was so friendly and happy to speak with me. You can tell that they were very close from the way that he spoke about my cousin. They really had some great times together and Eddie of course, remembers how Efrain used to struggle to walk but was not someone to complain.

At this time, Eddie has his own problems as he had both of his legs cut off due to diabetes. Even with his own problems, he still took the time to tell me that my cousin is one of the most honorable and inspirational men that he has ever met.

#### 2. Betsy Santos, She wrote this herself:

First and foremost I will like to express the gratitude I have for this amazing friend that I love as if he was my own blood, my family, a man that I admire because regarding of his physical condition and a devastating accident that almost took his life he never ever gave up, or should I say...Never gives up!

My name is Betzy Santos I am a friend of Efrain Ortiz jr " El chef Efrain " and former owner of "La Lechonera Cayey" and " El Yunque Restaurant " in Orlando. I know Efrain for over 20 years and know about all the struggles that he has encountered in his life and especially after his accident and I admire his strengths, courage and I have learn that no matter what life throws at you, one should never give up on your dreams.

I had the pleasure to have him working for me in 2 restaurants I had and I must say how impressive it was to see him work non stop, getting to the location at 4 am ready to work without complaining about the pains he feels or was feeling at the moment and it was so gratifying to see how people will come from all over to support him and just to see him and talk to him and to eat his delicious food.

We all worked together including my children that see him as an "uncle" and he had several other help and besides working, we shared many laughs together as well as struggles. He has a amazing heart and is always looking for ways to help people.



## Florida's Most Inspirational Chef? EL CHEF EFRAIN



THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO  
READ THIS THROUGH TO THE END!

Though this was not a long book, I still appreciate that you took the time out of your day to read through it. It seems that the most precious commodity that we have in this life is time. No one has an unlimited amount of it.

I'm not sure if there will be many responses, but I would love to hear from you and possibly get ideas as to how I can further help my cousin. If you know him and want to contact him, you can email me at: [support@elchefefrain.com](mailto:support@elchefefrain.com) or visit the website [www.elchefefrain.com](http://www.elchefefrain.com)

If you are in the Orlando area, or close by, and need a caterer, I know I don't have to say it....call El Chef Efrain! He really goes above and beyond to make sure that his events go well and that you are happy. You can even call him directly at 1-407-272-1372 and tell him Cousin Louie sent you!

Besides writing, I really enjoy helping people solve problems and will offer some services below.

### WEBSITES:

I do have teams of people that love helping others, especially small business owners that are struggling to market their businesses nationwide. If you need a website for any reason, here is where you can go to get both price and quality: [www.floridawebsitewarehouse.com](http://www.floridawebsitewarehouse.com)

### DEBT SOLUTIONS:

If you or someone you know, has debt that is out of control, visit [www.murdermydebt.com](http://www.murdermydebt.com) for some help. In Spanish, visit [www.mrdeuda.com](http://www.mrdeuda.com)

### MOTIVATION:

This was a project that I built to help people with health, business and motivation; [www.yourgoalsanddreams.com](http://www.yourgoalsanddreams.com)

### HISPANICS IN ORLANDO:

Here is another business that I am promoting also, that is designed to help finally bring the Hispanic community to helping one another through businesses. Hispanics make up a large part of Florida and the economy. This is still in

the early stages but Hispanic business owners are being allowed to post for free at this time (3/26/18).

Here is that link: [www.myspanishbusiness.com](http://www.myspanishbusiness.com)

Lastly, if you are business minded and someone that takes ACTION and sees an opportunity in any of these businesses, contact me and let's see if we can work something out. It takes a team that have various talents to make big things happen. You can use the contact forms on any of those websites and someone will send me the message.

Good luck to all of you in everything that you do. If my cousin can get up every day and be ready for whatever this life brings, then I am sure that you can do the same thing.

Remember that we are all in this together. Once we realize this, our part of the world can be a much better place.