

## A EULOGY TO MY FRIEND, MY AMIGO, MARCO PABON, 1961- 2015

By Cliff Davis

One could say that the stars were aligning themselves perfectly the day I met Marco Pabon.

The year: 2000. The Rhulen Rock Hill 5-Kilometer Road Race was in its post-race mode, with hundreds of runners and walkers crowded into the courtyard of Frontier Insurance, in Sullivan County, enjoying plentiful food and a beautiful June morning.

Suzanne Loughlin, the daughter of the founder of Frontier, was announcing age-group awards after talking about her beloved father's untimely passing from leukemia, at age 66, and the funds being raised this morning to fight leukemia.

Suddenly, I was being introduced to Marco. With his strong Colombian accent and the chatter around me, it took awhile before I realized that he was volunteering his expertise on computers to take over the demanding job of statistician for the Hudson Valley Grand Prix (a year-long, membership-driven series of 15-18 races in the region, in which runners accumulated points for performance in the same way auto racers accumulated points).

He was 38 years old, I was soon to discover, had earned a mechanical engineering degree in Colombia, was a tough chess player, a lover of literature and a computer whiz at Frontier. He was married, with two sons.

Besides, he was athletic, focusing on road racing, and we of the Grand Prix committee wanted runners in the key organization positions. He was a perfect fit.

For the next 13 years, Marco pumped thousands of race results into his computer. He'd send me his culled list of age-group and overall winners provided by the race timers, and I would double-check his work before posting progress spreadsheets on Orange and Sullivan clubs' websites. Essentially, we carried on a long-range electronic communication.

Marco's athletic prowess and toughness led him to regularly win or place in his age-group at a full range of race distances. It was at the races that he and I interfaced, often discussing Grand Prix "business."

From time to time, we shared off-hours dinners at his favorite restaurant, Ruby Tuesday, in Middletown.

In truth, the Grand Prix succeeded on the back of Marco Pabon. A statistician of his caliber, who would be willing to endure 13 years of year-long labor and not ask a penny in return, is indeed a rare individual.

I called him el Estadistico, the statistician, and Marco the Magnifico, in numerous e-mails to him.

Then the stars which had continued to be in perfect alignment began to re-arrange themselves ominously.

As the summer of 2013 approached, I began to see a slowdown in the results being sent, and those which did come through had more errors than usual. I, Marco and John Finnigan, who had taken over the director's job from me, found ourselves apologizing to the membership for the slowness of postings and the errors.

In this time period, I admit to certain confusion in the sequence of events, but the general outlines include his telling me how he had crashed into the wall of his apartment, a disorienting episode apparently caused by a migraine headache. The concussion had caused an edema---blood and other fluids collecting in internal swelling. This image was captured in an MRI.

On July 16, 2013, an episode led to another medical visit. He was diagnosed as having a sinus and ear infection, then given antibiotics and Tylenol.

Then he had a parking lot accident with his car. It was to be the last time he would drive a car, because a doctor issued a statement that he could not drive due to certain medical factors; clearance later on would be possible only with a neurologist's permission. Perhaps the "factors" included his mentioning to the doctor (and to me) that he saw people crossing the road in front of him when he had been driving, when in fact no one was there. Marco called the incidents "hallucinations."

His conversations became more animated, almost manic, and his gesturing got exaggerated.

He was forced to close down his Middletown apartment and move in with his brother and family, in Harris, Sullivan County. (Since he was banned from driving, he was unable to provide himself with an income.)

As I understand the subsequent events, another MRI was performed, and this one detected an irregular "mass" on the brain. Here, Suzanne Loughlin, of Frontier, interceded, and drove him immediately to Westchester Medical Center. (Loughlin had a renowned neurosurgeon relative; she had reached out to him for a second opinion. That, it seems, was the confirmation she needed: the mass was cancerous.)

A 39-year-old neurovascular surgeon, Dr. Yin Hu, operated within a day or two. He had discovered what is known as a glioblastoma, a deadly cancer because it has no clearly defined edges but rather numerous “tentacle-like” extensions. More importantly, there is no known cure for it. Normal cells turn into stem cells, and getting all the tumor mass is impossible.

Subsequently, I brought Marco to Westchester consultations several times. He had, on each occasion, invited me in to hear the most personal information, maybe because he no longer trusted his capacity to understand clearly. On one such visit, I distinctly recall Dr. Hu’s words: “Marco, the typical survival time for this tumor is 14 months.”

To forestall the further spreading, Marco’s nephew Ariel drove him to Crystal Run for radiation therapy; however, chemo or radiation therapy is a battle against long odds because the cancer-spreading stem cells multiply so rapidly.

When Marco and I could, we discussed the great works of world literature because he had an abiding interest in such books, especially the novels of his countryman, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Nobelist. Sartre, Camus, Saramago, Borges---he knew them all, and their philosophies shaped his world view.

In late 2014, he was again confronted with a decision: to have another operation or not. He elected to do it, in spite of the fact that the already dangerous first operation set the stage for an even more dangerous procedure. Paralysis, sudden death were possible.

Again, Suzanne Loughlin brought him to Westchester.

In January, I visited him at his bedside. He was barely able to communicate. However, I did hear him remind me to get some of the money we had left from the Grand Prix treasury for student scholarships through the Sullivan club. In fact, I was bringing him news that morning that the Grand Prix had voted to release \$1000.00 for the scholarships.

In those winter weeks, hospice was brought in to assist him and the family. Later, he was transferred to a nursing home in Liberty, where he died on April 29th, at age 53.

Marco’s courageous fight reminds me of the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, who wrote, in part:

“Do not go gentle into that good night...”

“Rage, rage, against the dying of the light...”

Thank you, amigo, for all that you did for us.