



Gilo Angelo Muirragui

November 13, 2023

On November 13, 2023, Gilo Angelo Muirragui passed away peacefully in his home in Montclair, Virginia. He was 98 and a half years old. During his final hours he was accompanied with the presence, love and gratitude of his daughters, grandsons, a devoted long-time friend, and his caregiver. He was also joined in spirit by numerous family members in North and South America. Those mourning his passing will forever remember his extraordinary kindness, intellect, humor, generosity and love towards others. In death, as in life, Gilo Muirragui touched many lives for the better and linked many persons together in loving bonds.

He was born in Riobamba, Ecuador in 1925 to Angel María Muirragui Donoso, a physician, and María Isabel Villagómez Román, an artist. His was a distinguished family of jurists and physicians. His grandfather, Pacifico Villagómez, was a member of the Ecuadorean House of Delegates, Governor of the Province of Chimborazo, judge and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and briefly Minister of Foreign Affairs under President Eloy Alfaro. His uncle, Alfonso Villagómez Román, founder of the first children's hospital in Ecuador, perished at a young age trying to contain the spread of hemorrhagic plague in Riobamba.

Gilo Muirragui grew up in the now historic center of Quito, a city he loved. Inspired by his grandfather, he received a bachelor's degree in social sciences

and a Doctorate in Law from the Central University of Ecuador. Like his forebears, he was a fervent advocate of economic progress and social justice in the country of his birth. In the early 1950's he migrated to the United States where he worked in an appliance factory and as an elevator operator to support himself while he learned English and earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of San Francisco, California. In the City by the Bay, he met his future wife, Eileen Mary, daughter of immigrants from Ireland. Their marriage lasted almost 69 years until her death in 2022.

Following their nuptials in 1953, the couple moved to Boston, Massachusetts after he received a scholarship to pursue a post-graduate degree at Harvard University. There he studied economic theory and international economics under eminent professors. Shortly before his Harvard graduation, his first daughter, Eileen Isabel was born.

In 1954 he returned to Ecuador with his young family that grew to include a second daughter, Maureen Elizabeth. He was part of the first generation of Ecuadorean economists trained at Ivy League universities in the United States in the post-World War II period. In 1958, the U.S. Embassy in Quito transmitted his biographical information to U.S. government agencies noting that "Mr. Muirragui is one of the most promising young intellectuals of Ecuador." For eight years he was a professor of economic theory at the Central University of Ecuador. He also served in government posts at the Central Bank of Ecuador including as Director of the Department of Economic Research and Head of the International Policy Section. He received scholarships to study in France and Germany to explore how to strengthen economic cooperation and trade between these countries and Ecuador. He also was Minister Adviser in International Economic Relations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In September 1962, he accepted a position with the International Monetary

Fund in Washington, D.C. and the family relocated to Bethesda, Maryland. At the IMF he worked as senior economist specializing in international standards for national statistics and accounts. He was also a lecturer at the IMF Institute in Monetary Analysis and Financial Statistics. His language skills were an asset to this work because he was fluent in Spanish, English, French, Portuguese and Italian. He served in over 100 IMF technical assistance missions in 40 countries which included nations as varied as Vietnam and Cambodia, the United Arab Emirates, Portugal and Cape Verde. He also worked extensively in the Western Hemisphere and served as IMF Resident Representative in Paraguay. He retired from the IMF in 1989. After retirement, he worked as a consultant to the governments of the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, and as advisor to the Central American Monetary Council. He became a citizen of the United States in 1995.

Focus on his professional accomplishments perhaps leaves out his greatest achievement-- his full and loving embrace of life and of those he met on its path. Believing that the most boring word in the English language was "I", he showed genuine interest in others and over decades constantly expanded his circle of lasting friendships. He was always there to listen, support and provide wisdom. He regaled others with gifts including luscious figs from his garden. As an eternal optimist and romantic, he arranged many blind dates which led to romance and a happy marriage.

His travel around the world always included stops at bookstores and music shops to add to his fabulous library and rich music collection of classical, folk and choral music in multiple languages. Among his favorites were the tangos of Carlos Gardel, leading his wife Eileen to note that their first daughter was likely fluent in Argentine lunfardo since she heard so many tangos while still in the womb. A strong believer in non-violence, he loved the Hallelujah Chorus of Handel's Messiah. Another favorite song was the Yves Montand version of

Autumn Leaves (Les feuilles mortes), which he sang with the joie de vivre of a drunken sailor with his daughter as they walked in autumn on the shores of Lake Montclair, Virginia.

He took his wife and daughters to many international destinations and always encouraged them to learn more about the places they visited and the people they encountered. He enjoyed travelling by road in the United States with his grandsons, listening to and singing country music, including one of his favorites, John Denver's Take Me Home, Country Roads. He also took the grandsons to Ecuador several times so they would understand their family roots and his love of Ecuadorean ceviche.

Although he was as thin as a rail, he adored good food and often invited others to try new cuisines and restaurants. His fondest culinary memory was of exploring back streets and alleys in Vietnam where he and wife Eileen ate what both agreed was the most delicious food they had ever tasted in their lives.

His company was great fun. His sense of humor was legendary, and he would entertain friends and family late into the night with amusing stories and jokes which were continually expanded and embellished after he consulted his extensive collection of joke books. He delighted his grandsons with magic tricks, and with imitations of trendy musicians or of Latin American demagogues giving speeches. One minute he could be listening to Elvis Presley or hip-hop music with a grandson, the next he would be quoting Cervantes, Garcia Lorca or Kipling. In the latter's words, he was a man "who could walk with kings but not lose the common touch."

While abroad he maintained ties to Ecuador and worked to forge strong family bonds linking generations despite distance. He was a devoted uncle to nieces and nephews, even if geographically separated. One said that his life was

transformed by reading the books in Uncle Gilo's library, including the Harvard Classics. Another said he was the kindest man he had ever met. Another noted that he was "the gold standard" of the Muirragui family.

Always an athlete from his pole-vaulting days as a young man, he biked to work long before it was popular and swam daily well into his late eighties. On a dare, he beat his 12-year-old grandson in a running sprint when he was 75 years old, a source of family amusement to this day. He was a "futbol" (soccer) buff and in his later years insisted he had to continue to live at least until the next World Cup. He would go on to see seven World Cups after first mentioning that sentiment in 1994. His physical stamina and tenacity allowed him to recover from a broken back when he was over 92 years old. He was always experimenting with how to use his walker for resistance training, and he continued to walk up and down stairs until the last days of his life.

His caregivers during his final years had great affection for him because of his kindness. One named her newborn son after him. Another was delighted when he spoke to her in Italian calling her "beloved" (mi amore) and considered him a second father since she had lost her own. Another came back to see him years after she cared for him.

His life was that of a man born in a small town in one of the smallest countries in South America who became a citizen of the world. His small town, small country beginnings never constrained his search for universal knowledge, wisdom or purpose. Every day he strove to influence others to try to make the world kinder, just, tolerant and peaceful. Every morning when he greeted others he smiled; every evening before sleeping he expressed thanks to those in his life. During his final hours, even when he could no longer speak, he mustered the energy to open his eyes, point and gently clap at those with him as if saying bravo to you all and to a life well lived.

He will be greatly missed by daughters Eileen and Maureen Muirragui, grandsons Jason, Sam and Matthew Muirragui, sister Alicia Muirragui Villagómez of Quito, Ecuador, numerous nephews and nieces in the United States and Ecuador, friends, neighbors and caregivers. In the refrain of one of his favorite songs, he will be missed most of all on the anniversaries of his death when autumn leaves begin to fall. His ashes will be interred next to his late wife, Eileen Mary, at Historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2024 when the family will come together to celebrate his life. Donations in his memory may be made to Doctors without Borders.

Cemetery Details

Congressional Cemetery

1801 E St SE
Washington, DC 20003