

Today is Father's Day and I have decided to sit down and write a few lines about someone who I consider that although he was not a father became a true Father to many of us.

The first time I saw Father Walsh, as we used to call him back then, he was visiting Camp Matecumbe to meet with some of us and listen to our grievances about the way meals were being served. Very respectfully, we explained what we thought was going on, he listened and we saw a change.

Shortly after that, I was sent to St. Raphael's Hall and our contact was more often, especially when I had to see him because I did not meet curfew.

On certain week nights I would work for a few hours in a window factory near St. Raphael's. I needed the money to buy medicines for my dad in Cuba and to go out with my girlfriend and friends. One night Father Walsh was waiting for me. Very patiently he heard all the good reasons that I had for working, he understood, but had to enforce the rules already known to all of us. I understood and I switched to daytime Saturday jobs.

I was part of a musical group called "The Eagles". One night at the Dupont Plaza Hotel we had our premier performance as the backup band, the dance lasted longer than we had anticipated and when we returned to St. Raphael's happy, full of enthusiasm and making plans for the future, Father Walsh was waiting for us. He was very clear and to the point, we were under his care and had to accept the established rules. We had mutual respect and in all these occasions of reprove he never faltered my dignity or talked to me in a bad way. That was the last time "the Eagles flew".

In February of 1965 I turned 19 and could no longer be part of the program but still had until May to graduate from La Salle High School, Father Walsh told me my tuition would be taken care of, I worked part time to sustain myself and to continue sending medicines to Cuba.

The day of our wedding he took time from his busy schedule to celebrate along with Fr. Pala.

Years later we started to see him more often, every 26 of December we visited him at a Camp on Biscayne Blvd and 114 St where he lived with the last group that participated in the program. He would tell our children that he was their "abuelo".

Whenever I saw him he would introduce me as one of his "muchachos" and always gave me the impression that he said it very proudly.

An Indian proverb states that we will be known forever by the tracks we leave behind. Father Walsh has left so profound tracks in me that I feel that the least I can do is to try to keep alive the torch he ignited with his "Fiat" when he was asked to be in charge of an "operation" that nobody had a clue how complex and important was going to be for the lives of so many.