



## LOCAL OBITUARIES

## He faced bomb threats but was determined to change the exile community's mind-set

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Javier Bray went through life citing “Don Quixote” as his favorite book.

“I carry it with me everywhere. It tells about a sense of justice,” he told the Miami Herald in 1984 of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s book.

Ten years earlier, in 1974, Bray helped found the Spanish American League Against Discrimination (SALAD). He was administrative assistant to Paul Cejas, then-chairman of the Miami-Dade County School Board, and served on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Miami chapter.

A “sense of justice” informed his life, said his wife, Brenda Shapiro. Bray died Aug. 7 at his Miami home.

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“I had the privilege of working alongside Javier when the Spanish American League Against Discrimination was created, and I learned so much from him. He opened my eyes to the importance of civic engagement, and inspired me to embrace community service by caring for the underserved,” said Miami Dade College President Eduardo J. Padrón.

“The Hispanic community in Greater Miami and our city as a whole owe Javier a big debt of gratitude. His vision helped create today’s Miami, a place where we value diversity and foster inclusion,” Padrón, a former SALAD chairman, said.

Born March 29, 1928, in Battle Creek, Michigan, Bray lost his father, a high school language department head, when he was 2. Along with his brother Harry, who survives him, Bray was taken to Matanzas, Cuba, to be raised by their widowed mother, aunts and grandmother.

Shapiro believes that his family, which included an uncle who was a lawyer in Cuba, inspired Bray's career choices. "Those kind of values are engendered in the family you're raised in," Shapiro said.

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Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón.

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Bray graduated from Matanzas Academia and, at 18 — fueled by a desire to claim his citizenship, serve in the U.S. Army, and study under the G.I. Bill — came to Miami.

The Army initially didn't want him because he spoke only Spanish. A cousin insisted that the Army test him anyway, and his mathematical and aptitude scores were so high that he was accepted in 1942. "He was on kitchen duty," his wife said, chuckling. "He learned English in the Army and became 100 percent bilingual."

After serving for four years, Bray earned a bachelor's in Latin American studies and a master's in political science at the University of Michigan. He worked briefly in New York for Dunn and Bradstreet in the Latin American Division, became an interpreter in Washington for the Foreign Visitors Bureau, and went to Harvard to join a training program to sponsor rural development projects in Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador.

He returned to Miami in 1974 as founding director of SALAD and its first president.

"He really believed that his job was to take the Cuban community from an exile mentality to a refugee mentality to permanent resident mentality," said his wife.

His focus on the life of Cubans in the United States was "not on the past," he told the Herald. He understood the desire to hold onto yesterday — he drove his beloved *guaguaita* — Volkswagen bus — for years, but rigidity served no one.

"I like to stick to symbols, routines and patterns. I am conservative and ritualistic. And yet, at the same time, I can be thrown into a new culture, grow with it and enjoy it," Bray told the Herald. "I don't want to be parochial, to be limited."

His style wasn't popular with everyone.

"He was loved and reviled. No one could figure whether he was a CIA agent or not. He got bomb threats," Shapiro said.

The couple met in the late 1970s when Shapiro was director of the American Jewish Committee. Together with SALAD's sponsorship, the committee hosted the first large bilingual conference in Miami at Temple Israel, Shapiro said. Bray taught classes in translation and interpretation at Florida International University.

"He dreamt in both English and Spanish," his wife said. "When he talked in his sleep in later years, he would sometimes speak in Spanish and sometimes in English."

After his retirement in 1997, Bray, who managed numerous alternative schools for the Cuban American National Council, continued his efforts on dropout prevention. "That was his life's mission," said his wife.

Bray's survivors also include daughters Ingrid Biancone and Cristina Disney, and 10 grandchildren. Donations can be made to SALAD or the ACLU. A memorial is being planned for December.

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