



ROBERT GAMBE

Miguel Buisán P'77, P'80, P'87 *Instructor in Spanish, Emeritus (1924–2008)*

Humor was a staple in Miguel Buisán's classroom, as was the requirement that all students speak in the target language.

For Miguel Buisán, growing up in a great port city made the call of the sea that much harder to resist, and resist he did not. Born in Barcelona in 1924, he received his Bachelor of Science degree from the Maritime Academy in 1945 and then served 13 years in the Spanish Merchant Marine as first officer, sailing the waters of Europe and the Americas. Miguel found himself on land again when the ship he was sailing on was sold. Franco's Spain was not known for encouraging initiative, but a new direction opened up in 1954: He met Berta, who was soon to be his wife. Two short years later, they left Spain for a new beginning in the U.S., turning Spanish into his passport.

Miguel plunged into a study of Spanish language and literature at Southern Connecticut State College and Yale University, earning a B.A. in 1968 and a master's degree from Middlebury College in 1973. He supported his family, now grown to include two small sons, Michael '77 and Ricky '80, by teaching Spanish at the University of New Haven, Quinnipiac College and Yale University before accepting a position at the Academy in 1966. His third son, Daniel '87, was born here in Exeter, while Miguel was a resident of Abbot Hall. After Abbot, Miguel spent four years in the Spanish dorm, accumulating 18 years of dorm service in all.

Miguel was one of the early proponents of teaching exclusively in the target language and no one else could bring that same level of energy to the classroom as he did. As one student put it, "There is only one 'Señor.'" He was determined to bring a balance of learning and fun to the classroom. He told a new member of the department, "A class is successful only if students have laughed at least 10 times." Miguel commented that no one had ever fallen asleep in any of his classes. "I tend to terrorize for the first few days—it's usually my voice that does it—the machine gun, but I'm really a friendly guy." One student remembered how he raised his voice or smashed his hand against the blackboard for attention, perhaps even threw erasers, but he never stopped joking. Fall, winter or spring, the windows of his classroom on the third floor of Phillips Hall were always open. With Miguel's stentorian voice, anyone passing by in the quadrangle learned Spanish by immersion. The corridor would resound to the door opening and closing with a slam at least once per class. "¡A la calle! (Get out of here!)" he would holler. That joking was perhaps Miguel's greatest tribute to his students. From the first class on, he spoke to them as if he were addressing native speakers: Miguel knew they would understand and respond in kind. He always put students first, and his affection for them was reciprocated when the class of 1989 dedicated the *PEAN* to him. Miguel won a Brown Award for excellence in teaching in 1987, gave a session on Spanish teaching for the NAIS conference, and corrected MLA Foreign Language Proficiency tests. He led numerous Academy-sponsored student study tours in the summer to Spain and Mexico.

Miguel shared his passion for teaching with new colleagues in the Modern Languages

Department, working generously with them long before *mentoring* became a word for it. He threw himself into school activities as well; he was a long-term adviser to the International Club, which with his encouragement offered an annual dinner for the senior citizens in town. He was the coach for the high-powered *Club Soccer* team, the Hot Spurs, one that was hardly ever beaten in that very competitive league.

Miguel and Berta loved good food and in the Spanish tradition of a late evening out, they sampled every restaurant in a 30-mile radius of the school.

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The American classroom had been Miguel's ship for 30 years when in 1989 he heeded the "Back to Spain" call and retired to live near Barcelona. He died on November 22, 2008 while watching a tennis match on TV with Berta at his side. Berta herself wrote to the dean of faculty to pass on the news, finishing with the comment that he had never forgotten the school or his students. "He dreamt very often that he was teaching a class, and in the morning he would be all smiles." ●

This Memorial Minute was written by Joseph Reiter P'91, P'96, P'98; James Samiljan P'85, P'90; and Vicki Baggia P'91, P'92, P'03, chair, and was presented at faculty meeting on November 18, 2009.