

J. G. Manning

## Eugene “Gene” Cruz-Uribe

“Whatever else you do, you are required to attend Fridayfest each week. Otherwise you will not be successful here.” What is “Fridayfest?,” I exclaimed in my ignorance. “We meet at the Pub (a small space in the basement of Ida Noyes Hall at the University of Chicago where graduate students would meet) each Friday at 5,” Cruz responded with what I would later come to recognize as his signature laugh, a huge grin, and a twinkle in his eye. “It’s the key to finishing your degree at Chicago.”

Cruz was right of course. Socializing each week with fellow students and some of the faculty of the OI was really one of the more important lessons I learned at Chicago. Having some semblance of a normal existence, a network of support, once in a while anyway, was the key to long term survival. This was not the only lesson I learned from Cruz, who became a kind of mentor to me, and a true friend of mine, despite what became a long-distance friendship. I would see him from time to time, at conferences usually, and his smiling face was always a delight to encounter. “Well, at least Cruz is here, it will be fun” I always said to myself. That was the kind of guy he was, always smiling no matter what, always encouraging no matter what else was on his mind, always generous and kind.

We had many good times together, and I have a collection of very fond memories. There was the time we went together after the Demotic meetings in Pisa to Ravenna. He insisted we have an adventure after the meetings. We had a glorious day looking at mosaics and walking around the town. When we got hungry later that day, we walked into what was literally a hole in the wall, a four-table restaurant, no menu, no one else eating. We almost turned around and left, but a very friendly man popped out from the kitchen, greeted us and asked us to sit. We were hungry and so we did. Thus began one of the great meals of my life. The chef simply prepared what we wanted to eat, and it was superb. We must have stayed for three hours, eating, drinking, talking. Everything about the evening was a dream. And it was classic Cruz. Were I on my own, I don’t think I would have walked into the place. But Cruz had said “let’s check it out.” And am I glad I followed his lead. There were many moments like that through the years.

Perhaps my favorite memory (it’s one I re-tell often) was driving from Chicago to Providence in the summer of 1983 to help him set up shop as he began his new job at Brown University. Cruz and I drove out in a large rental truck, with his beloved pick-up truck in tow, along with two dogs. We drove through the night, sharing turns driving, and talking the entire way, about demotic, about family, and other things. When we reached Rhode Island we were both exhausted and hungry. We stopped at

a local café, leaving the dogs to their own devices inside the pick-up truck. We ate quickly and were again on our way, being close to our destination. As we drove up a steep hill, Cruz exclaimed “Do you smell something burning?” I did, and then I saw smoke in the rear-view mirror. It was his beloved truck!! We stopped and realized that one of the dogs (I guess), somehow, had slipped the truck into gear, in reverse! Needless to say, the truck’s transmission was done.

Among my last memories was when I saw Cruz in Aswan in 2007. I was leading a tour and had told him to stop by to say hi if he had the time. He was working on graffiti (of course!) at a temple in Aswan. I had no illusions that he would actually show up. But as I was about to give an after dinner talk to the group, in prances Cruz, large grin and all, smiles at me and proceeds to sit down as if we were both back at the pub in Chicago two decades ago. Somehow Cruz had found our boat (there must have been twenty ships docked together). Even more, he had made the time to stop by. He charmed everyone that night and it was so good to see him. Of course, there were many times after this when I saw Gene and Kathy, in California, at an occasional ARCE meeting or elsewhere. We spoke on the phone often about work.

But like that night in Ravenna, his showing up at Aswan out of the blue reminded me, as if I needed to be reminded, that Cruz was a special person. A true friend, a hard-working scholar, constantly searching, down-to-earth, warm-hearted and always, always optimistic. He is sorely missed by me, and I know by the entire community of Egyptologists, both in the States, and around the world.