Jorge Bermudez was born and spent his first 10 years in Cuba. He distinctly remembers the revolution: “Bullets flying, airplanes strafing overhead ... sleeping on the floor because bullets might fly through the walls. It was a very interesting time to grow up.”

But after the Communist takeover, his memories include “lack of food, lack of medicine, lack of clothing. We began to see how uncomfortable life was becoming in Cuba.” And twice his father, Diomedes Bermudez, who had been a rancher and a high-ranking official in the Agricultural Development Bank of Cuba, was taken away by the secret police. “Both times he came back, but it was a very uncomfortable time, because we also saw people that were arrested never come back.”

After the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, “It was clear that if we were going to have a chance at a new life, a new beginning, we had to leave.”

Unable to get official permission to emigrate, his parents turned to “Pedro Pan,” an underground program of the Catholic church. On December 28, 1961, Jorge sat on a plane with his brother, leaving Cuba without his parents, who were unable to get permission to leave at that time. Jorge would begin his new life in America living with a foster family in Los Angeles.

“Fortunately for us, mother and father were able to leave eventually,” he says, though like everyone else leaving Cuba at the time, they were allowed to take nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Bermudez’s father was an educated and successful man, but when he arrived in the United States a year later, “He took a job as a janitor, $19 per week, just to get our family back together,” Bermudez says. “Seeing a man at 49 years old restart his life, you begin to get a sense of what a work ethic will do for you.”

On the day Diomedes Bermudez took his sons back from the foster family, a social worker gave him an $11 government payment to help with the children’s needs. He tried to refuse the money, but the social worker insisted.

“I’ll always remember at the end of the first week when he got paid, he took my brother and me and we went to see Mr. Duffy at Social Services. He went with Jorge Bermudez knew all about integrity before he got to Texas A&M. While growing up, he watched and learned as his father demonstrated that value in the face of a revolution, government persecution, the separation of his family, the loss of all their possessions, and then having to build from scratch a new life in another country.
amazing how quickly you begin to meet him and his luggage to his dorm. “It’s a pickup recognized his plight and drove Aggie hospitality, when a young man in dorm. But that led to his first exposure to try, new state, new situation.”

“I literally thought, I’ve gone to Hell. It was a very depressing day—new country that gave him so much opportuni-ty, new state, new situation.”

His father would eventually rebuild his banking career in the U.S., and that career would lead the family to Colombia, where Jorge attended an international high school. There he met two men who told him about Texas A&M University.

“As young as I could remember, I wanted to be involved in agriculture and I wanted to be banker, because my father was a banker,” he says. The two men in Colombia knew A&M would be a good training ground for someone interested in agribusiness. Based on their recommendations, Bermudez decided to attend without knowing anything else other than what he had read in a course catalog.

When he arrived at the College Station airport, “It was a very hot day, as Texas can be on the 4th of July.” When it was still hot at 9 o’clock that evening, “I literally thought, I’ve gone to Hell. It was a very depressing day—new country, new state, new situation.”

And he got lost while trying to find his dorm. But that led to his first exposure to Aggie hospitality, when a young man in a pickup recognized his plight and drove him and his luggage to his dorm. “It’s amazing how quickly you begin to meet people here and how quickly you get taken by what is A&M, and what are Aggies, and what that means. Over the next five and a half years, a very deep love for this place developed.”

In those five and a half years, Jorge would obtain bachelor’s and master’s degrees in agricultural economics. But another deep love also developed while he was in College Station—he met the woman who would become his wife. Denise Pressley was a part-time student at Texas A&M and worked in the office of an apartment complex where Jorge lived as a graduate student. She remembers first seeing her in the office; she vividly remembers first seeing him getting out of a sports car in the parking lot. They began dating shortly afterward and have been together since.

In the fall of 1974, Bermudez was about to start his career in the midst of a depressed economy. “I had always told her I would not get married until such a time as I had a paying job,” he says. “So when I got the letter from Citibank offering me the job, that is the same day I said to her, let’s get married.” They married the next day, Nov. 8, 1974.

He would spend his entire career with Citibank and Citigroup, rising from that first entry-level trainee position to chief risk officer for Citigroup worldwide. Until he retired this year, he was a member of Citigroup’s Operating and Management committees. During a career in banking that took them around the world, Jorge and Denise raised four children, Jorge II, Andres, Elena and Antonio.

It is important to the Bermudezes to give back to the University and to the country that gave him so much opportu-nity. In the fall of 2007, they estab-lished the Jorge A. Bermudez ’73 Family Endowed Scholarship Fund, to benefit the dependent child or spouse of an Aggie or veteran killed or disabled in a conflict; or the dependent child or spouse of an Aggie or veteran who served in a conflict. The Bermudez scholarships, established through The Association of Former Students, were designed to be perpetually funded. Ten deserving students were recipients for the spring semester of 2008.

“Our armed forces play a critical role in defending the freedoms we enjoy,” he says. “I saw what happens to a society and our family when these liberties are lost. I feel a deep gratitude, that my family shares, to the veterans who have defend-ed our freedom.”

Bermudez has never forgotten the les-sons his father taught him about integrity. At the enhanced Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center, a wall highlighting the A&M core value of integrity will be named for the Bermudez family.

Bermudez gives back in many other ways as well. He is a member of A&M’s International Board and the develop-ment councils for the Mays Business School and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. He is a sponsor of the

Many universities around the world are able to provide an education. However, what makes A&M unique is that it helps shape values that are so necessary to lead a successful career and life.

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