



# Roberto Morales

MAR 14, 1968 - APR 17, 2025



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# Roberto Morales

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**R**obert was a man of quiet brilliance and many gifts—a creative spirit with a steady hand, a heart full of kindness and an uncanny ability to quote movie lines in any given scenario. He moved through life with a calm that grounded those around him, serving as both an anchor and a rudder for the people he loved. As a successful business owner, devoted coach, thoughtful mentor, loyal friend, father, and deeply loving husband, Robert gave generously of himself without ever seeking the spotlight. He was intelligent without arrogance, strong without force, and gentle in a way that left a lasting impression.

Robert Morales, a first-generation American, was born on March 14, 1968, the son of Cuban exiles. He was raised in Hialeah by a strong, intelligent mother whose love and devotion shaped his early life. His childhood planted the seeds for what would become the major pillars in his life—his love of food and football, his commitment to service, and his fierce loyalty to those that he loved.

Robert's love for football began in childhood, playing pickup games with neighborhood kids—a passion that quickly grew into something almost devotional. As a teenager, he coached a team of underprivileged kids where their success took them all the way to Canada—an experience that left a lasting mark on him. He began to see football not just as a sport, but as a powerful tool for shaping lives and building character. A devoted student of the game, Robert went on to volunteer as a coach at several local schools, including John Paul II, Florida State University's special teams, and Leon High School. One especially meaningful moment came when the legendary Coach Bobby Bowden called him 'Coach', a word that, coming from such an icon, meant the world to Robert. Through his mentorship both on and off the field, Robert touched the lives of countless young people in Miami and Tallahassee, leaving behind a legacy of compassion, guidance, and inspiration.

Robert graduated from FSU with a degree in Criminology but felt compelled to take a chance in the restaurant industry. His passion for cooking was a gift from his mother that he honed through



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his college years by cooking for his friends. Food was Robert's love language, and he shared that love with the Tallahassee community as one of the original founders of Gordos Cuban Cuisine in 1996 and as the CEO of Black Bean Food Group which he opened in 2004 with the help of his *primita*, Patty Swain.

In 2016, Robert landed upon his dream job – University Dining Program Manager at FSU. He took a very personal and caring approach to his work, wanting every student to have a taste of home in their food offerings.

Robert met Betty, the love of his life, when he was 19. Betty always said she knew Robert loved her the moment he first laid eyes on her, and the deep friendship they built became the foundation for a beautiful marriage. To know Betty and Robert as a couple was to know love, to know friendship, and to know big, loud infectious laughter. Betty loved finding opportunities to make Robert squirm, and he let Betty drag him into some oddball ideas and spontaneous adventures. He may have rolled his eyes and shook his head, but he did it for her – usually– just because it made her happy. They complemented each other perfectly and Robert loved Betty every single day that they were together.

Of all Robert's many gifts, none shone brighter than his role as a father. From the moment he learned Betty was pregnant, he embraced fatherhood with his whole heart, and if he were here today, he would tell you—without hesitation—that Alicia was his greatest pride. He was the kind of father every child deserves: safe and steady, endlessly kind, deeply understanding, unshakably encouraging, and funny as hell. It wasn't long ago that Robert looked on with pride as he watched Alicia accomplish something truly monumental in a Cuban family - she made a perfect *cafecito*, *espumita* and all. We're lucky to have a video of that moment and if you watch it you'd hear the pride, love, patience, and the teasing sense of humor that we all knew and loved him for.

Just as he was a devoted husband and father, Robert treated his friends and extended family with the same steadfast loyalty and deep presence. His innate calm nature, intelligence, and humor brought both warmth and laughter to all. If you were lucky enough to have Robert in your life, things just ran smoother—and the food was fantastic.

In 2017, Robert was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disease that damaged his kidneys. He lived through countless hospitalizations, dialysis treatments, and a kidney transplant after years on the transplant list and remained positive and grateful through every moment. It was this spirit of gratitude that characterized Robert in all his endeavors. Thanks to Mayo Hospital's transplant



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team and especially his nephrologist and friend Dr. Hiren Joshi for the care and compassion they extended in what was a very difficult time. It is this ongoing fight to live that makes his tragic death on April 17, 2025 even more unbearable.

Robert's life was ended by what can only be described as an act of violence and hate. He should be with us today. But if Robert were here, he would not want us to dwell in anger. He would want us to focus on the small, steady acts of love that defined him and that keep him with us now.

Please don't let Robert's life be reduced to the tragic way it ended. Remember him, instead, for the way he lived.

A private memorial service is planned. Please honor Robert's legacy by doing something he would have loved: Support a local restaurant. Make a meal for someone you love. Volunteer in your community. Help someone. Mentor a young person. Register as an organ donor.

The whiteboard in Robert's office has these words written in his handwriting: "Do not strive to have your presence noticed, but your absence felt."

Robert - your absence is deeply felt and always will be.



# Tribute Wall

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**Sherry Barner** posted:

My Son and many other young men had the privilege of receiving guidance from Coach Morales while he was at Leon High. Coach Morales will be fondly remembered by the players and parents alike for his deep kindness and interest in see young men succeed in every area of their life.

May 7 at 5:38 AM



**Robert Gamiotea** shared a photo to the **Tribute Wall** album.

Me and couple of us got to grow up with Robert we had a great time growing up we ran around the neighborhood dad would take me and Robert fishing and to airshows we even skated together yea I know. He was a very good skater wish we had camera phones back just so i could have shared the videos. He was a great friend and will always be a part of the Gamiotea family. So I know he was a great husband and father. So he will be missed. Robert buddy we love you and will miss you The picture is of the group of his neighbor kids he grow up with



May 5 at 2:59 PM



**Lori Hunter** May 5 at 10:52 PM

My deepest condolences to Betty and their daughter. May God provide peace & comfort for them during this time. Lori Hunter



## Tribute Wall

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**Amanda Johnson** lit a candle in honor of Roberto.

I feel so blessed to have known Robert. He loved his family so much!!! He truly made the world a better place.

May 5 at 11:28 AM



**Jann Tucker-Pettway** May 21 at 11:39 AM

Betty, we are so sorry for the loss of Robert. Bless you.



**Da Ruiz** May 5 at 1:00 PM

Betty, Roberto helped me through my junior year in figuring out how to provide the excess food from the athletic dining hall to the unhoused. I remember about coladas, batidos de mamey, and pastelitos although I can only imagine how much you miss presence. Please know that I think highly of him.



**Gabrielle** May 5 at 12:33 PM

I am so very sorry for the loss of such an amazing human being. My prayers to Betty and to all who love Robert.



**Leslie Reimer** May 5 at 11:53 AM

Betty, Robert was truly an exceptional human being. I know you will always cherish his love that lives on in your heart.



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## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Roberto by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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