

## Spotlight on Al Alayon: A Journey of Sacrifice, Success, and Soaring Dreams



In the golfing community of Somerset Plantation, it takes more than a reliable swing to stand out. Al Alayon stands for his warm sense of humor, a remarkable life story, and just enough humility to blame the occasional errant shot on “course conditions.”. Al is a dedicated golfer and family man and embodies the American dream forged through his parents' extraordinary sacrifices, a thriving business career, and a lingering "what if" about the skies above.

Al's story begins in Cuba, where his parents, Alberto and Bertha Alayon, built a modest but stable life. Born in 1919 and 1918 respectively, Alberto worked as a hardware wholesaler, while Bertha was a skilled seamstress. As first-generation Cubans with roots tracing back to the Canary Islands, they instilled in Al and his older sister the values of hard work and faith—Bertha's devout Catholicism meant mandatory Sunday church, even for a reluctant teenager like Al. Family traditions like Noche Buena (Christmas Eve) and Three Kings Day brought joy, but everything changed with Fidel Castro's rise in 1959.

Cuba, once prosperous in the 1950s, veered toward socialism, prompting Alberto and Bertha to make a heart-wrenching decision: flee for their children's future. By 1961, they were ready, but the U.S. embargo in early 1962 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October halted direct flights. Undeterred, they pursued a legal route through Mexico in early 1963. The cost? Abandoning their home, their business, and all assets—leaving with little more than the clothes on their backs. After awaiting green cards in Mexico City, the family immigrated to Dallas from 1964 to 1967, then settled in New York City. For young Al, then 7 or 8, the journey was an "adventure," but it was a tremendous act of parental love, trading their existing life for freedom and opportunity in the U.S.

That sacrifice paid dividends. Heeding his parents' clearest advice—“get an education and work hard”— Al delivered, becoming the first in his immediate family to graduate from college when he earned a business degree from the University of Buffalo in 1979. He started at Pete Marwick Mitchell (now KPMG), where the hours were long enough to qualify as an endurance sport, before moving to Westinghouse Electric. There, his bilingual skills fueled a successful international career—and, far more importantly, he met Chris, his future wife. They married in 1983 and have been building a life centered on family ever since.

Influenced by his mother's resilience and a practical New York mindset—“trust, but verify”—Al learned to welcome life's unexpected turns. Today, he reflects on life's unexpected turns with gratitude, emphasizing positivity, strong relationships, and family as keys to happiness. Yet, Al's optimism is tempered by deep concerns about the direction of Western civilization, including the United States. Having witnessed his family's escape from socialism in Cuba, he is troubled by what he sees as a similar veer toward socialist policies in the U.S. and Western Europe. He also worries about attacks on religious freedom—echoing the curtailment of faith under Castro's regime—and the impacts of unfettered immigration, viewing these as threats to the hard-won liberties that defined his parents' sacrifices and his own path to success.

As a grandfather, he looks forward most to watching his grandkids grow into happy, healthy adults (and, with any luck, decent golfers). Speaking of golf, the game has delivered some bragging rights. Few players can casually mention sharing a ride with PGA legends Tom Kite and Ian Baker-Finch on the way to a charity outing. Even fewer can say Lee Trevino personally invited them into the locker room and signed a cap for their son-wonderful memories!

If there's one dream that never quite cleared the runway, it's aviation. Al once hoped to become an airline pilot and even earned a private pilot student license, logging enough hours to fly solo. "Every time I board a plane, I still wish I were sitting up front," he admits. Given airline service these days, that may not be the worst ambition.

So how would Al like to be remembered? Not for business accomplishments or scorecards, but for his good humor, his refusal to take himself too seriously, and his devotion to his family. It's a fitting legacy for a man whose life reflects adventure, perseverance, and the wisdom to enjoy the ride. Around the club, Al Alayon reminds us that the American dream often begins with sacrifice, grows through hard work, and is best celebrated with friends—preferably on a sunny fairway with a putt for par.



Al with cousin in Dallas



Al & Bertha college graduation



Al's pride – grandsons



Al and Chris