

**W**hen Camilo F. Cruz left Bogotá, Colombia, in 1980 for the United States, he was twenty. He spoke no English, but he had a high school diploma and a bankroll of \$200 for launching his dream—to become the first Latino to win the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Twenty years later Cruz is living a different dream: being an instrument for positive change in people's lives. Fulfilling that goal made him an internationally successful motivational speaker and writer, while the plans he made to pursue an education in physics became the model he shares in his motivational presentations.

As a young man in Colombia Camilo was one of 20,000 prospective students who applied to the only two universities that offered degrees in physics the year he graduated from high school. Rejected for one of the 600 openings available, he left for the US.

Finding shelter was Cruz's first worry, the solution to which only led to a series of bigger problems. Like many immigrants, he knew someone who knew someone who might have a place for him to stay. His contact, a Colombian woman, offered to share

her basement apartment in one of the toughest neighborhoods in Jersey City, and he moved in with her and her three children. Three days later the woman announced she had to go to Colombia for three days. She put Camilo in charge, gave him \$70 for expenses, and left. She never returned. He spent her \$70 and his \$200 and started working in a restaurant to support "my newly found family."

The arrangement lasted three months, until the missing woman's husband appeared. "Before I could explain anything," says Cruz, "he told me to get out or he would call immigration. I got out." He never saw any of the family again.

To learn English quickly, he enrolled in the University of New Jersey in subjects—chemistry, physics, calculus—he had already studied in Spanish. There he met Shirley Mahabin Singh, a Hindu from Trinidad pursuing a major in biology; they dated for seven years before marrying in 1989. After completing degrees in chemistry and analytical chemistry, Cruz entered Seton Hall University in New Jersey, worked as a teacher's assistant, and earned a Ph.D. in chemistry, specializing in analytical spectroscopy. For the next ten years he taught

quantum physics, thermodynamics, and math.

## Opportunity knocks

He was starting his own company in 1989 when Hispanic Heritage Month rolled around in October. "Scouts were looking for someone different to have on the program," he says. "Someone gave my name." Interviews on radio and television and in the newspaper followed.

People asked him, "How do you do it? How did you go from having nothing to where you are now?" The questions excited him as he realized that his technique for achieving success might be instructive to others. "In the early Eighties," he says, "many immigrants from Latin America were running away—from prejudice, oppression, misery, or starvation, or, like me, running from a lack of opportunity."

The problem, as Cruz saw it, is that even after reaching the US they keep running from something, instead of toward something. They never pause to ask: What are my dreams? What do I want to do? What do I want to accomplish? "Because they don't do this," he says, "they spend their lives just surviving."

In analyzing his own success, he insists there was "nothing grandiose

In communicating the physics of personal motivation, Camilo Cruz earns a prize nobler than the Nobel.

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