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Never Preachy." - *San Francisco Magazine*

PAPA CADO



**WHAT AN ORDINARY
MAN LEARNED ON HIS
EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY
THROUGH LIFE**



A TRUE STORY BY
M.G. Crisci

PAPA CADDO

Medical Community Reviews

Arthur is one of my most inspirational patients. Ever! He's been through a ton, and keeps smiling. *Papa Cado* as chronicled by M.G. Crisci was a very, very interesting book that I found full of insight and inspiration. As a busy medical professional, I also found it super easy to read. Very approachable. May Arthur live another fifty years!

-Paul Tierstein, M.D.

When I began to read *Papa Cado* for the first time. I laughed, and then I cried. The more I read M.G.'s amazingly honest depiction of Arthur's amazingly inspirational life, the more I laughed and cried. The book also tenderly captures the values he, as a single parent, instilled in raising daughter Mindy."

-Vrenli Wilson, Ed.D.

Arthur "PAPA" Mercado is a noble man who has gone through life with a smile in his heart, despite being dealt a difficult deck of cards. M.G. Crisci's book is an engaging, inspirational chronicle of that journey. *Papa Cado* will lift your spirits, put a smile on your face, and make all your little problems go away."

-Austin Gontag, Ph.D.

Arthur Mercado became my patient 11 years ago after being told he had a less than 10% chance of living another year. His journey has been uniquely chronicled by his friend, author M.G. Crisci. *Papa Cado* is an enjoyable, informative and inspirational book. It is mandatory reading for anyone who has faced adversity in his or her life. Arthur's noble tips on and about life are unforgettable, insightful, and will leave a smile on your face.

-Erminia (Mimi) Guarneri, M.D., FACC

I realized you were an extraordinary gentleman when you became part of the Scripps Healing Hearts Program. But reading your life story as

Papa Cado I learned so much more about your incredible journey. You are an inspiration to me and all those around me. I admire your strength, attitude and caring wisdom. Your gentle soul and spirit shines each day; how powerful it is. I am honored to know you.

-Ali Partner, M.S. Physiologist

The book is wonderful. I've known Arthur for nearly 5 years and really had no idea of totality of what he'd been through. M.G.'s sensitive unveiling of Arthur's story is simply inspiring. Sometimes I wonder how I would face a chronic, serious illness. I can only hope I would have the grace, courage and inner strength Arthur has shown. *Papa Cado* helped me realize how much we as medical professionals can learn from our patient's stories.

-Brenda Rodi, N.P.

PAPA CADDO

Reader Reviews

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed learning about *Papa Cado*. I couldn't put it down. I read it in one long day. I can't stop talking about it. I am circulating it friends, just like the library.

-Mary L.
Michigan

YES!!!! I loved the book, its great! I loved it!!! I loved wife Susan's letter to Arthur. It brought a tear to my eyes. Arthur is truly a miracle and been thru more than I could ever have ever imagined. It's a great read!

-Harry G.
Portland, OR

As soon as I saw the book and read the inside flap I, I had tears in my eyes. I looked at all the pictures and read bits here and there. I was especially moved by M.G.'s words and tribute to Arthur thru Carole King. I cried reading that. Everybody should own this book for that inevitable rainy day.

-Sheri G.
San Francisco, CA

Papa Cado provides positive testimony to man's unconquerable spirit and ability to face life on life's terms. Arthur's journey deserves a medal of honor.

-Joseph R.
Budapest, Hungary

I just finished reading *Papa Cado* and tears of love are flowing down my cheeks. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for sharing. It's 3 A.M. — I'm wide awake and my heart is open to the beauty of life.

-Sandy L.
New York, NY

I read this book in 2 days, could not put it down! Such a touching story and so uplifting for anyone that is struggling with any health issues. Perhaps if everyone would have the courage to share their life like this, maybe we would all be more understanding of each other and kinder to each other. I've passed it on for my family to read.

*-Julie E.
Los Angeles, CA*

I enjoyed the books subtle levels. The family stories, the father/daughter experiences, and, most of all, the life lessons. Every chapter revealed a new experience. Everything was to the point, never drawn out or boring. The pictures before each chapter were a nice touch as well.

*-William B.
Green Bay, WI*

This story is an inspiration for anyone who has faced challenges in life. Arthur's positive attitude despite physical and other challenges demonstrates that an upbeat approach to life is truly a healing power. I recommend this book to anyone seeking an uplift in their daily life.

*-Gloria F.
Indianapolis, ID*

I really enjoyed this story. I think men need to read this story who think that their role in their children's lives are not important, and they walk away or give up making a difference due to issues with the mother. Thank you Mr. Mercado for sharing your family and your story with us all. I loved the part at the end with the letters. I did not have a dry eye when I was finished.

*-Rhonda T.
Irvine, CA*

This book was difficult to put down. The story is heartwarming, encouraging and challenging to the reader. I loved the lessons at the end of each chapter and especially loved the letters to *Papa Cado's* loved ones and their responses to *Papa Cado*. It made me cry and fall in love with this honorable, generous and kind man.

*-Robert M.
San Diego, CA*



Also by M.G. Crisci

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Indiscretion

Mary Jackson Peale

Now & Then

Papa Cado's Book of Wisdom

Salad Oil King

Save the Last Dance

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Papa Cado

M.G. Crisci



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*To Arthur,
My hero, my role model, my brother*

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Preface



I met Arthur Mercado, known to his four granddaughters as Papa Cado, some time ago, at the Scripps Hospital Healing Hearts Program in Southern California, where we both live.

Why was I there? My high-powered, self-consuming business career had left me little time for a balanced life-style. In other words, I had allowed myself to be a genuine candidate for a heart attack. Two years prior, I had been diagnosed with a cardiac condition called atrial fibrillation — a fancy medical term for a racing heart. While my doctor reassured me, “we don’t have any actual research on the correlation between life expectancy and atrial fib, so you’ll probably live a *relatively* normal life. However, there was a caveat, “However, you realize you are now in a different risk category.”

She also “suggested” I enroll the hospital’s heart healthy program, which she described as “an innovative, holistic approach to lifestyle change.” It took me only 24 months to heed her suggestion! By then, I was sick and tired of taking pills that made me lethargic and light-headed. I visited the program director. She took one look at my pouch, gave me the 60-second overview, took my credit card, smiled, and welcomed me. “We think you’ll find the 12-week program quite

comprehensive" The program curriculum included classes in Yoga, Spirituality, Stress Management, Nutrition, and Vegetarian Cooking. I was rather skeptical, to say the least.

Day 1 found me in the gym with four classmates — middle-aged, borderline men and women—grunting and groaning. Day 2 was filled with stress-management support sessions — a first for me. Next thing I know I'm sitting in a semi-circle. This gentle, soothing sounding dude named Ozzie introduced himself as "the group's facilitator." He asked us to hold hands. It seemed a little homo to a pre-conditioned-macho like myself, but I'd already spent the \$2,800 bucks, so I put my hand out. Somebody else touched it. I looked straight ahead.

Ozzie asked how we felt. You could hear a pin drop. Since I was an accomplished public speaker, I volunteered to go first. I figured my new "best friends" might as well hear my tale of woe, so they understand how lucky they are not to have my problems.

I spoke about five minutes. Ozzie nodded. Kris, Keith, Shirley, and Arthur said nothing. After all, nobody was allowed to place value judgments — it was part of the ground rules. I think to myself, 'good on ya.' Probably shocked the hell out of them.

They each begin to recant their stories. For some strange reason, I decide to listen. I've never been accused of being a great listener.

Twenty minutes later, I realized I was the luckiest man in the world. Kris had an incredible story about loss of a limb he had dealt with since birth, and Shirley has endured enough pain and suffering to drive you to atheism. Keith, who appeared healthy as a horse and strong as a bull to boot, seemed more like me. He was looking for someone to explain why he was like he was. There I go again. Value judgments! I think I have diarrhea of the brain.

The final member of the group — a gray-haired man wearing gray pants, white t-shirt, white sneakers and a thick gray beard and glasses — sitting to my right and hadn't moved a muscle. I said,

“And, what about you?” He had stared blankly and scowled a deeply. 20 seconds went by. He announced simply, “I’m Arthur.” He also explained he told *those people* that he didn’t like to speak, didn’t want to speak, and didn’t plan to say much anytime soon.

I figure the dude was some kind of borderline manic depressive. Or a best, merely a deeply introverted personality searching for Freud’s id...or somebody else’s id.

I think, thank goodness, I’m not within range of the switch blade he probably carries in his back pocket to open beer cans and slice mangoes.

Arthur paused. I decide I’m going to crack this guy. After all, I’ve got a secret weapon...my bizarre sense of humor. I find myself hysterically insightful, all the time.

“So, Arthur, is that all there is to that?”

He stared at me. I tried to smile. Frankly, I’m a little intimidated.

“The doctors tell me I have no right to be here,” he calmly revealed. “I’m sixty-three and I’ve beat death twice. I love my wife (his third) and my only daughter, who I raised by myself, and my four wonderful grandchildren. I’m just doing the best I can *not* to die right now.” He paused. “That’s my story.”

My arrogance melted to insignificance.

His hand began to shake. “Damn hand, never used to do that. It’s that Parkinson’s thing. But the good news — when it shakes I know I’m still here!”

He smiled. We all laughed. He touched the heart of everyone in that room.

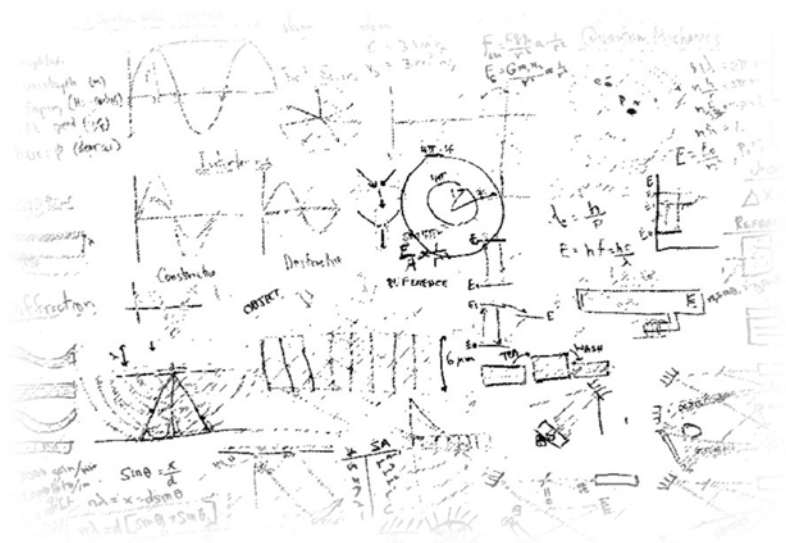
Over the next twelve weeks, I learned there was much more to Arthur’s story than just the 28 stents, 13 angioplasties, the five bypass, the mini-strokes, the nitro patches, and numerous other cardiac procedures. I decided I wanted people to get to know Arthur. We all have so much to learn from him. I was pleased he agreed to share his amazing journey with me.

I'm confident you will be inspired by Arthur's simple yet elegant approach to living a dignified life. I only hope I did justice to his insights, his wisdom, and the way he loves.

Matthew J. Crisci

Part One

Lessons Learned



Chapter 1

The Wall



This is me at age 3 (little guy on the left) with big sister Lori and brother James. Notice my fancy duds.

I was born at a young age! September 8, 1944.

Like most kids at that age, I don't remember much.

We lived in a modest but clean apartment complex in Mobile, Alabama, while Dad was stationed in the Coast Guard.

Dad was a lot of things, including proud, generous, hard-working, and tough as nails. He believed nobody should push you around. But there was one thing he was not. He was not affectionate. In my entire life, he only hugged me once when I was 18 years old. But more about that later.

Anyway, my first real vivid memory of anything was *that* Sunday. Typically, Sunday was Dad's day of rest — he worked six long days a week in the Coast Guard. He made it a point to spend most of his free time with the family. This particular Sunday, Mom and Dad took me, James, and Lori to the park a few blocks from our apartment. They had decided a picnic was in order. As you can probably imagine, my recollection of the precise details are a bit hazy, although sixty years later, some things remain crystal clear.

I was wearing a light-blue outfit with short pants, just like in the picture. We walked past a white cinder-block wall about three feet high. I looked up. To me that wall was so high it almost touched the sky. Dad looked at me staring, and smiled. He was about to teach me my first lesson of life. I guess he knew from some earlier experience — I don't remember why or when — that I was afraid of heights.

Dad whispered something in Mom's ear. I remember she started pleading gently, "Arthur, please don't." Dad's full name was Arthur Gallo Mercado. He was Mexican. Mom was a purebred Caucasian named Ernestine Lily Mae, whose mother freaked out when she discovered her daughter had married a Mexican.

Mom's pleading obviously didn't do much good. Dad was a man on a mission. Next thing I know I'm standing on the wall, and he's walking away. I began crying like a frightened three-year-old. Surprise! He started spreading a picnic cloth on the ground like nothing happened. I think Mom was afraid to say anything else. I'm really not sure about that; I was too busy bawling at the top of my lungs.

"Arthur, come on down," said Dad calmly. "Time for lunch. Mama's made some tasty sandwiches."

I looked at the rocky ground as the tears streamed out of my eyes. It appeared to be light years away. My knees wobbled. I became even more frightened. My hands began to shake uncontrollably. I desperately wanted to get down, but I was frozen in place.

Mercifully, after what seemed like hours, Dad finally took notice. Sometime later, Mom told me Dad had left me standing there for only 30 seconds. I honestly don't think Dad fully comprehended how prodigiously steep a four-foot wall look-ed to a three-year-old kid. He walked over, stared in my eyes — I'll never forget his disappointed expression—and said, “La Voughn (I didn't become Arthur until the third grade), do you need help to get down?”

I nodded yes. “Pop, take me down, take me down.” I extended my hands. Dad held them firmly as he removed me from the wall.

Once on the ground, I started apologizing. I knew. “Pop, I'm so sorry.” My hands and body continued to quiver.

He knew I was embarrassed. But he refused to hold me in his arms or console me.

“Let's eat. I'm starved. La Voughn, want a sandwich?”

The fear subsided. My hand stopped shaking.

“La Voughn,” he explained, as we sat on that picnic blanket, “let me tell you something. *It's okay to be afraid. Just don't ever let it stop you from doing what you need to do.*”

That's the way I lived my life the next 60 years. And plan to live whatever time I have left the same way.

Chapter 2

Toasted Pecans



*Mom and Dad in Mobile Bay. We had a real house,
a back yard, and a big pecan tree.*

Life was good!

When I was five, we moved into a small house right off Mobile Bay. I think the name of the street was Dearborn.

We lived across the bay from the shrimp boats. Some Saturdays, when Dad got off duty, and we had a little extra money in the family jar, we would drive over to the boats and buy some of the day's catch. Then Mom would come home and make one of Dad's favorite dishes in the whole world, shrimp gumbo.

Our house had a white front porch and a small back yard, which was quite a change from our little apartment. Smack dab in the middle of the back yard was the largest pecan tree in the world! My world, that was. By late summer and early fall, the tree was full of pecans. By late fall, the leaves and pecans started to tumble down in significant numbers. Mom used to say, “Gallo, make sure you clean those leaves; don’t want the children to slip and fall.” Dad would take the rake, make a big pile, pecans and all, and burn the stuff until there was nothing but embers.

One day, James said to me, “Something sure smells good in that pile.”

He figured it was the pecans. So he went into the nearby woods and came back with a long branch with a fork-shaped end. He went over to the smoldering embers and carefully pulled a few pecans from the pile. “I’m guessin’ the dark ones are cooked,” he said.

I reached over to pick up one. My scorched finger told me the shells were hot as hell! We waited a few minutes, until they were hand-friendly. James bounced one on the cement walk to crack the shell. I did likewise. Moments later, we were eating the yummiest, sweetest pecans ever.

Dad walked over with a scowl on his face. “You boys messing up my work?”

The cat got James’ tongue.

I handed Dad a toasted pecan. He smelled it, and started to eat it. Then he did something out of the ordinary. He smiled. “You boys making something out of nothing. Good thing to know.”

I’ve been *making lemonade out of life’s lemons for a long, long time*. People that know me tell me I’m resilient as hell. I just wish ~~something~~ I didn’t have so many lemons to harvest.

Chapter 3

Castleberry Christmas



*Me, age six,
at Grandma's annual family Christmas celebration.*

Christmas Eve at grandmas was always a wonderful time, full of rituals and good cheer. Plus, Grandma seemed to have a knack for the dramatic.

The Christmas tree always stood in the corner of the living room, steps from the fireplace. By the time the family gathered, Grandma — "Ali B," as my sister Lori called her—had decorated the

freshly-cut tree with ornaments, some made, some purchased. There was an empty stocking for each of us kids sitting under the tree.

Grandma would bring out a rope line and tie it from the window by the fireplace across the room to the door by the kitchen. She'd always got Dad to help. The adults would drape quilts over the line, enclosing the fireplace and the Christmas tree. The ritual made the excitement unbearable.

Next, Grandma announced, "Time for some apple cake." We would march into the kitchen, where the most scrumptious whiskey-soaked apple cake sat on the table. From the point of view of a six-year old, the stuff was fabulous. To this day, I can still taste and smell the whiskey in that cake. I also remember thinking, *How adult! Sucking down whiskey just like Mom and Dad.* The entire family ate, told stories, and had a jolly time in the kitchen.

This one particular Christmas, we heard the sound of footsteps on the roof, then some scuffling in the living room. "What is that racket?" asked Dad.

"I didn't hear anything," smiled Grandma.

"Well, I'm going to check it out," persisted Dad.

"Not just yet," responded Grandma.

There was dead silence.

"Now," said Grandma.

We all returned to the living room and watched Grandma remove the quilts from around the Christmas tree. I was the first to notice a change. "Look, Grandma, the stockings are filled." They were filled with fruits, nuts, and a huge peppermint stick.

Lori noticed the packages wrapped in different colored paper next to the tree.

James walked over to the fireplace. "Look at this," he said, pointing to soot foot prints that went from the fireplace to the tree and back.

That evening, at the dinner table, we asked Dad and Mom how Grandma did the Santa Claus trick, since we were all present and accounted for. “I really don’t know,” said Dad. “Honest.”

We turned to Grandma, who had just entered the room. She had a big smile on her face, like she knew something. We begged and pleaded to identify “the who.” She just shook her head. During the next four Christmas Eves, the exact same thing happened. Even Dad and Mom began to wonder how she did it.

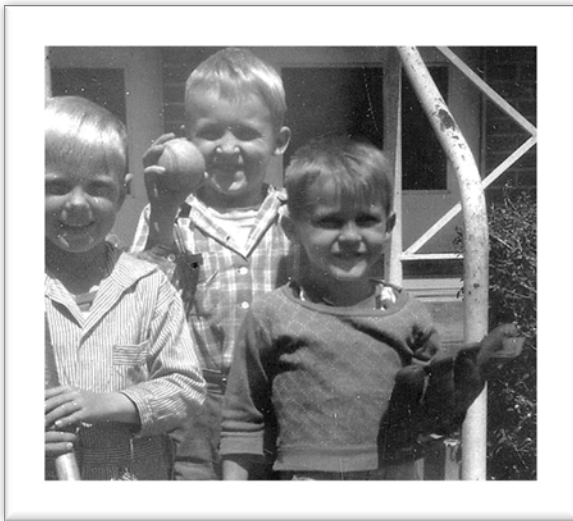
Eventually we moved from Castleberry, and Grandma passed.

She died without ever telling anyone what really happened. The Mercado family still really doesn’t know if Santa really visited that house. I know we’re adults and Santa is supposed to be a myth passed on through the generations.

Every now and then, I remember Christmas in Castleberry, and I ask myself, *because you can’t reach out and touch something, does that mean it doesn’t exist?*

Chapter 4

Tough Times



*That's me front and center with James (in the rear),
and our friend Bunky, not long before we moved to Grandma's.*

Moving in to Grandma's was a treat and a disappointment. I'm now age seven. Unbeknownst to me at the time, after the Coast

Guard, life got hard for Pop. He wasn't making much money selling Bibles door-to-door. So he got a job at Shelly Air Force Base nearby in civil service, whatever that was.

I surmised Dad's pay was low, since before long he was looking for another job. But, there didn't appear to be much application for his Coast Guard skills in the local economy, so he and Mom decided to move to greener pastures in California... at least once they had saved enough money.

Moving was a little more traumatic for James and me. We had made a lot of friends in school and didn't want to leave them. Bunky was our super-best-friend in the whole world. The three of us played baseball every chance we got. The day we left for good, Bunky gave James and me a brand new baseball he had just gotten from his father. I can still see the tears in Bunky's eyes as we drove away. For some reason, I didn't cry. It didn't seem right. Bunky was sad enough for the three of us.

I'm really not sure whether Mom's mother, Grandma Alibi, volunteered, or Dad just flat out asked. All I remember is we were driving under the Tallulah Bankhead Tunnel on the way to Castleberry, Alabama. Dad turned around, in his usual stern tone and manner, "We're going to be living with Grandma Alibi for a while, so be good."

Grandma's place was a big old, sprawling house with more bedrooms than she could ever use and a back yard that seemed huge compared to our postage stamp yard in Mobile Bay. Of course, Grandma was not exactly Jake Gatsby. The house had no gas, no electricity, and no running water. Yet the back shelf of the wood stove in the kitchen always had a pot of that Louisiana specialty, red-eyed gravy and a plate of homemade biscuits there for the takin'. They were absolutely deeeelicious! I can still smell the aroma and taste the crumbs as they slid out of my mouth and down my overalls.

The sink had a hand pump. Grandma used to keep a pitcher of water by the sink to prime the pump. That was always my job.

We had two ways of taking a shower. You could go out in the back and pull a cord on a bucket. Man, was that water cold! When Pop could afford it, we went to the barbershop in town, where for five cents a person, we could take a hot shower. That was almost as nice as Grandma's biscuits.

The back yard was kind of a swamp. No...It *was* a swamp. We had alligators, copperheads, water moccasins, and a bunch of other animals I don't remember. It was great! One day, a deer had the misfortune of wandering into the yard. Grandma took out a rifle which was almost as big as her, placed it on her hip, and shot the deer flat out. We had venison steak for the next week. Every night was like a special Sunday dinner.

The best part of Grandma's house was the bedroom where James and I slept. There was a small fireplace in the corner to stay warm on even the coldest days. But the *pièce de résistance* was the featherbed. When you lay down, you were enveloped in six inches of the softest, most comfortable feathers. It was like sleeping on a cloud. When I pulled that thick comforter over us, all seemed right with the world.

Grandma taught me a lot during that year. I learned everybody has responsibilities. There are no free rides in life. Most of all I learned that *being loved unconditionally is the greatest feeling in the world.*

~

I don't remember exactly how long we lived with Grandma in Castleberry, maybe a year or two. But eventually, the time came. Dad and Mom packed our 1949 Chevy, and we headed to Los Angeles, California, right after Christmas.

Best I can remember, the year we moved I spent the third grade in three different schools. The first semester in Mobile, the second

in public school in Los Angeles, and finally a little Catholic school in L.A. It was there I officially became Arthur.