

## *A Journey Full of Heartbreak*

Jose and Micaela Balaguer recently celebrated their **62<sup>nd</sup>** wedding anniversary. Jose, now 85, has dementia, and Micaela, 82, is his full-time caregiver and legal guardian. Micaela lovingly attends to every detail of her husband's care. She bathes and feeds him, fusses over his hair, and even shaves him the "old fashioned" way.



The Balaguers

***But the journey to this place has been full of heartbreak.*** In 2001, Jose traveled to California for a two-week visit with his daughter, Maria. That ill-fated visit turned into a 3-year legal battle when Maria refused to allow her father to return to Tampa. Despite Micaela's pleas to her daughter and the California legal system, Jose was placed in a California assisted living facility under the conservatorship of a stranger. Penniless, due to the continuing dispute between his wife and daughter, Jose seemed destined to live out his remaining days away from his bride of over 60 years.

In 2004, Micaela unexpectedly received an anonymous phone call from California—Jose was on a plane to Tampa! Micaela was surprised and overcome with emotion as she awaited the joyous reunion. She also knew the legal battle was far from finished.

A private attorney referred Mrs. Balaguer to Bay Area Legal Services. Bay Area Attorney Heather Tager agreed to seek a Florida guardianship despite Maria's continuing demand that her father be returned to California. After a contested proceeding, Ms. Tager prevailed in having Micaela named as Jose's legal guardian. Micaela gave her caring attorney a hug and whispered, "***You are my guardian angel!***"